PARTISAN REVIEW

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CONTENTS

SCENES FROM THE DEER PARK, Norman Mailer 527

THE PRETENDER, Lionel Abel 535

POEMS, Donald Hall, Alan Ansen, David Ferry, Allen Grossman, J. V. Cunningham, Sylvia Plath, Adrienne Rich 552

HIGHBROWS AND THE THEATER TODAY, Louis Kronenberger 560

O'NEILL'S LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT AND NEW ENGLAND IRISH-CATHOLICISM, John Henry Raleigh 575

NOTES ON A SUBURBAN THEATER, Robert Brustein 593

ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT DRAMA, A. Alvarez 606

LOVE, LOVE, LOVE, Gore Vidal 613

THE ACHIEVEMENT OF BERTOLT BRECHT, Harold Clurman 624

NEW PLAYWRIGHTS, Angus Wilson 631

PARIS LETTER, Jean Bloch-Michel 637

ROME LETTER, Nicola Chiaromonte 643

POETRY CHRONICLE, Marius Bewley 650

CORRESPONDENCE 664

INDEX TO VOLUME XXVI 671

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NORMAN MAILER's new book, **Advertisements for Myself,** will be published this Fall by Putnam.

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Norman Mailer

SCENES FROM THE DEER PARK

The Deer Park is an experimental commercial play, written with the emotional shorthand of the Broadway theater in mind. I call it experimental because my desire was to see how far one could engage and then exacerbate the conventional emotions of an average audience. The portion extracted here includes those scenes which would be most unbearable for such an audience, and so gives a false impression of the play which has twelve scenes and could not be staged in less than three and a half hours. The piece in its entirety, done properly, would have, I hope, the promiscuous stimulations of a good cocktail party; it was put together as a sort of revue: comedy, drama, melodrama, satire, even *conversation* revolving through the scenes like the turns of the evening.

SCENE SEVEN

EITEL*'s living-room, after* DOROTHEA*'s party. It is almost dawn.* EITEL *and* ELENA *enter silently. She is in a state of private animation, not exactly drunk but very high. She takes out a thin cigarette which could conceivably be a stick of marijuana, lights it, inhales deeply with a hissing sound, muttering* "It's been a long long time." *Then she begins to whistle the operatic air* BEDA *was humming at the end of the previous scene.* EITEL *ignores her.* ELENA *comes up behind him and laughs—he still ignores her. She starts to take another puff from the marijuana, and instead presents it to* EITEL *who puts it out carefully in an ash-tray.* ELENA*, weaving just imperceptibly, then tries to kiss him. He pushes her away.*

ELENA: Love, Charley—I love you.

EITEL: Don't touch me.

ELENA: I was just getting something out of me.

EITEL: Which will still be there tomorrow.

ELENA: Charley . . . I love you. I'm the only one who does.

EITEL: Love me?

ELENA: Yes, I love you. But I don't love you completely. You're too

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greedy. You don't really want me, and yet you want every last bit of me.

EITEL: You bitch, you worship stupidity as if it were your patron saint.

ELENA: You call me a bitch. If tonight had turned out better for you, you would be pimping me all over again, you would be telling me how wonderful I am. Well, let me tell you . . . maybe I want other rhythms in my body besides yours.

EITEL: I'll never touch you again.

She is about to say one thing, she is about to say another. Suddenly, it is gone—he has won for the moment.

ELENA: Oh, Charley, touch me . . . oh, lover, touch me . . . oh, lover, please believe that I am in love with your touch.

A silence.

Oh, Charley, don't you see, they wanted to give, they had to have me, and I was the center of attention. Oh come here, love, come to me.

But EITEL *remains unmoving, and in so refusing to come to her, she goes away from him and lights another stick of tea.*

You wanted to go, didn't you? You took a wife away from Don Beda, didn't you?

She grasps his head, holds his hair so that he is obliged to turn and face her.

Listen, I don't love you. I never loved anybody. I'm too conceited. So don't feel guilty. You don't owe me . . . nothing.

EITEL: Stupid!

ELENA: Want to know how stupid I am? I tried to commit suicide the day Collie told me he was tearing it. Yes. He said, "Sweetie, this is it," and it sure was. I sat in that lousy cheap hotel room he had rented for me, and I started to drink—alone—and I drank until the room wouldn't stand still—I thought I was going to die if the room didn't stop moving. "Collie," I kept saying, "you and me were just an old sewer."

EITEL: Shut your mouth!

ELENA: I'm just getting started, Charley boy. How do you like my crude manners, hey sweetheart?

EITEL: I loathe them.

ELENA: Well, who could have guessed? . . . "Collie," I said over the phone, I called him at your place—at this place—"Collie," I told him, "this is going to be a nice quiet sophisticated little call—I took a package of sleeping pills—I'm going to die, buster," ohhhhh, and then I started to scream. When he came to my room, I saw the executive in Collie, magnificent lover, he said hello, and slapped me a few

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times, and asked, "Where's the pill bottle?" and then when he saw it, he began to laugh, and he said, "You idiot, you don't even know how to kill yourself"—they were sedatives, not sleeping pills, and so he took me to the can . . .

EITEL *starts to get up from the chair and leave the room, but she catches him.*

No, you listen to every last bit of this . . . Collie made me throw up, he stood there, he watched me like I was an old rag, and know what? —it excited me. I was goofy with sedatives, and he had coffee brought up and he slipped me a benzedrine, and had me walking around, and all the while I was thinking of the way he had seen me throw up, and that was exciting, Charley, weird isn't it—'cause I always thought I liked my privacy, but it seems I didn't because I went to bed with Collie—we had one on the house now that we were finished with each other . . . Well, I never told you this, but Collie was pretty good, and I always used to act it was great with him, but of course I used to act with all of them until the night I met you . . .

At the look of disbelief on his face, she smiles cruelly.

—except that's a lie, you're right, Charley, because the night before you with Collie I let go, I mean I really let go—I thought I was in ether or something—what poison I was getting out of me, and the funny thing was I couldn't have cared less about Collie, why we even had a talk afterward and he decided he would see me for a night every now and then—and he would pay me. Dig, Charley boy?

EITEL: Are you done?

ELENA: Can't you take it, friend?

EITEL: I can take it.

ELENA: I mean consider my delicate ladylike elegant feelings. I mean this great jazz with Collie, and the moment he's done, he's got to make it clear that whether I love him or hate him or don't feel a thing, he still wants me to know that we are not together any more, and so he tells me that tomorrow you are coming over, you, Charley, my first John, my bathroom—Collie is setting me up in business—you sons of bitches—and you know what?—I was fantastically excited, I don't know if it was you or the situation or because I was finally nothing but a whore, but it was crazy with you, Charley, it was all the way out. And in the morning, the next day, when I began to realize you didn't think of me as a call-girl, that Collie hadn't said a word—oh, Charley, I was depressed and I was happy—you were good to me and decent, and I got confused. I should have cleared out because I wanted to be free and instead you were crowding me

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into a love affair, and don't think I didn't want it with you, except I knew I could eat up the whole world if only I wasn't afraid to live and be free.

EITEL: As of tonight, you are free.

ELENA: Yes, Charley, as of now. I'm free and it's frightening—oh Charley boy, it's terrifying as Hell, because women, Charley, weren't born to be free, they were born to have babies and I am getting weird and sick and wild and really scared inside because it's too good, Charley, I mean like tonight I got too much from everybody—it seems like it's never been this good before, and wow, why didn't I know how nice it could be to lie and to die in such a nice little way—oh my God, Charley, I've gone too far—I keep telling myself, "You can't cheat life," and yet I feel like I can, I mean Charley, let's cut the crap—you get on the telephone and get me a taxi because I'm going over to live with Marion—yes, there is where I should be—with Marion—he asked me tonight, yes, you cheap cowardly low-grade brown-nosing son of a bitch—do you have anything to say now?

Pause—with a laugh and a cry, ELENA *slams out the door.*

(*offstage*) Yes, yes, goodbye, Charley.

Long pause.

EITEL: (*worn to a whisper*) Where, in what cemetery of the heavens, do the tender words of lovers rest when they love no more?

CURTAIN

SCENE TEN

A Week Later

MARION FAYE*'s living-room. It is furnished with a few expensive pieces of furniture and a cold austere look. At the moment it is in disarray—it is apparent* ELENA *has moved in.* BEDA *has come out of the bedroom on the rise of the curtain, and is talking to* MARION. *While he talks, he combs his hair.*

BEDA: (*looking at his watch*) They're testing another atom bomb tonight.

MARION: So I have been told.

BEDA: Come over with Elena for a drink. We can watch from my house. I understand the light reaches even to there.

MARION: The view will be perfect from this place.

BEDA: (*has finished combing his hair—he hesitates*) Do you know, Marion, your girl is a brave girl in her way.

MARION: Everybody is brave, they say.

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BEDA: Don't ride her. She's near the edge.

ELENA *comes out behind* BEDA. *From the door of the bedroom she speaks in a sullen voice.*

ELENA: Here I am, Marion. I've come back to you enriched.

BEDA: (*to avoid the quarrel*) Children, see you in prison.

He makes his exit.

ELENA: (*laughs a little*) I want to be a real girl.

MARION: Yes.

ELENA: Life is most unusual.

MARION: You're having a fine drunk.

ELENA: I went with Collie three years and he never took me to a party.

MARION: And Eitel never asked you to marry him.

When she does not answer, only swallowing her drink, he continues to stare at her, and murmurs:

What do you say, Elena, marry me.

In the silence that follows, he lights a stick of marijuana, and they pass it back and forth as the conversation continues.

ELENA: You hate me . . .

MARION: I love you . . . why do you think I ask you to marry me?

ELENA: 'Cause you think it's a big joke.

MARION: Don't you love me anymore?

ELENA: Who could love you? You're almost as miserable as Charley Eitel.

MARION *laughs.* ELENA, *putting out the cigarette, picks up the phone and dials a number. She winks broadly at* MARION. *There is the sound of* EITEL'*s voice on the other end of the line.*

EITEL: Hello? . . . Hello . . . Who is it? . . . Elena . . . is it you? . . . Hello!

ELENA *hangs up.*

ELENA: It seems like my old pal Charley is still in town.

MARION: There you are, with your hard Wop heart, and yet you loved him.

ELENA: What would you know?

MARION: You really loved him. No wonder you never got around to telling Eitel about the men and boys you did to get a two-bit booking in a night club.

ELENA: (*dull voice*) I told you to make me a call-girl.

MARION: You can't make it as a call-girl.

ELENA: Why not? I could be a very good call-girl.

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MARION: When one gets to know you well, you're raw meat. You lack class.

ELENA: Then make me a prostitute.

MARION: Let's get married.

ELENA: I'd never marry you.

MARION: Dearest—what if I'm the one who won't marry you?

ELENA: I want to be a prostitute.

MARION: I don't touch prostitutes . . . I could send you to a friend though. He has a job where you could work like half in a whorehouse.

ELENA: What does half-in-a-whorehouse mean?

MARION: It means in a whorehouse . . . on the Mexican border.

ELENA: (*She looks frightened.*) I won't do that.

MARION: Are you a snob, doctor? Think of all the poor creeps down there and how they're crawling for you.

ELENA: (*Her voice lacks size.*) I'm getting out.

MARION: Get out.

ELENA: I'll go.

MARION: Can you find the door?

ELENA: I'd like to kill myself.

MARION: You haven't the guts.

ELENA: Don't taunt me. I could do it.

MARION *reaches into his pocket and pulls out a small bottle.*

MARION: I've been saving this for myself. They're like sleeping pills. Except that two is enough. That's all. Two capsules. But it's enough.

Lays the capsules on the table between them.

ELENA: You think I won't?

MARION: I think you'll look at them. (*He laughs.*)

ELENA *reaches for a drink, and with an impulsive motion swallows the pills.*

ELENA: There, I'm done. It's done.

MARION: You'll be asleep soon.

ELENA: You don't care.

MARION: You're great, baby, if you can hold out. (*stands up abruptly*) I mean like I don't know if I can watch.

ELENA: How long have you had those pills?

MARION: I put them in my pocket today.

ELENA: But when did you begin to think of having them . . . for me?

MARION: Lying next to you in bed. The first time. When you were just beginning to go with Eitel, I said to myself, "This child is the material out of which suicides are made."

ELENA: You knew.

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MARION: My mind never stops. I'm always hearing the words of my will. My will said to me, "You can make her kill herself." Do you know what I thought next?

ELENA *shakes her head.*

"Please not that, that's too much."

MARION *nods.*

Except that what I knew was that if I couldn't do this to you, I would never be able to do the other things.

ELENA: (*Dispiritedly—she is trying not to think of what she has done.*) What, Marion, what other things?

MARION: I hate the queer that is in me, and I knew—don't ask for any logic but love—that if I could make love to Eitel—yes, there was the man to fill myself and be in turn a man. I was in love with Eitel after you came along—I wanted him and I wanted you—the day you didn't go with me, I died my little bit.

ELENA: But I came to you. Finally I came to you.

MARION: Too late. You have the cruelty of the slow and the stubborn. You came to me only after you had bled the manhood from Eitel.

ELENA: I didn't.

MARION: You bled him like a leech—and now he can cure no queer in me for he is rotten to my smell.

ELENA: And so you kill Elena?

MARION: You're a detail—that's all. I have hatred in me that is killing me. Because I am too full of fear. So I have to dare . . . ultimates. I must dare to murder. I think that then I will have a power . . . inside me . . . greater than I have now. And if I am wrong, at least I will know that too. (*puffs on the marijuana*) I used to be a Catholic —you don't think I ignore the idea I may have to wait eternity in a Hell of hopeless space because I give these pills to you?

ELENA: (*From the shock of his words—she speaks as if to herself.*) It was beautiful with Charley. It was, I tell you. Charley and I had so far to go to meet each other . . . and love is beautiful at the end of a long trip. Now I'll never feel love anymore. Oh, Charley, forgive me, oh Charley, forgive—I'm so sick that it was more with Marion than with you. Oh Charley, I must talk to you now.

ELENA *gets up and goes to the phone. Drugged by the pills, she has difficulty in dialing.* MARION *looks at her—takes a step forward. She continues dialing—*MARION *goes up to her—he puts his hand on the phone as if to take it away from her.*

ELENA: If you stop me, you are right. Because I have brought good to no one.

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MARION: (*coldly, harshly, his voice filled with hatred . . . he lets his hand fall away from the phone*) It seems I have a sense of mercy after all.

ELENA: (*into the phone—in a listless, even voice*) . . . sorry to bother you . . . I took some pills . . . Please call the hospital . . . Have them send an ambulance over here . . . to Marion's . . . She's passed out.) I'm sorry, Marion, I'm so sorry, but I don't want to live . . . (*She begins to weep.*)

It is at this moment that the bomb goes off . . . hundred miles away—far across the desert. But the light through the window is intense, a white shuddering light. ELENA *screams, and* MARION *does not move. He merely looks at his hands. When the light has gone, a red glow is left in the sky. Then he begins to speak in a little private voice, a murmur away from the delicate voice of the sensitive gone mad.*

MARION: Dorothea, my mother, she made money from men when she was young, and I was her bastard, a passing gift from a passing prince no more—because the salmon of his seed did not have to feel such a vast desire to gain the rapids of a janitor's daughter. Yes, I was her bastard, and I grew up while she was doing her gossip column. The cruellest gossip columnist in the country. An assassin. She used to print the American flag next to her face. So I knew what it was all about. I mean I knew too early. She wanted me to be a priest. I was to be her sacrifice—do I have to spell it out? I have this idea so deep in my head—(*striking his forehead*) that the center of Hell must be in here, yes, I have this idea that I am a saint, and I feel what God feels, and He is in an extremity beyond mine because there is an extraordinary destiny He has to achieve and He does not know if He will succeed or not because He is a part of us. He is failing because we are failing, because we are too cowardly, because we want to move too slowly, and hold to what we have, when the world, the tangible substance of God, is ready to be blown beyond existence in those radiations of hate which none of us can contain any longer. There is a torment coming when the being of all of us will depend on whether there is a man brave enough, bold enough, to go further in his mind than anyone has ever gone and yet communicate his vision. And I am not that man. I am too weak. I have failed God again.

As the curtain comes down, there is the wail of an ambulance siren coming closer and closer.

CURTAIN

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Lionel Abel

THE PRETENDER

ACT I
SCENE I

When the curtain goes up we are in the living-room of JESSE PRINCE*'s newly purchased home in a rural section of Mississippi. The house is probably an old single-story building, but the furniture is modern, and in good taste. On the bookshelves are books in foreign languages, and on the walls are paintings by the most advanced American painters. There is a window to the rear, to the left is the door leading to the road, and to the right rear is a door opening to the bath. Another door, also to the right but closer to the audience, leads to the bedroom. To the right front there is a desk with a typewriter on it.* JESSE PRINCE*, about thirty-five years old, tall, athletic, and elegantly dressed in black sports jacket and grey flannel trousers, is in the act of setting three chairs next to each other against the desk and parallel to the audience. He sits down in one of these, then immediately gets up, looks about the room, and locates a foot-stool. This he carries to the other end of the stage and sets it down facing the three chairs. He steps back, then comes forward, mounts the foot-stool facing the three empty chairs.*

JESSE: Members of the Faculty, Students, Ladies and Gentlemen: It is a pleasure and a privilege to present the speaker of the evening—(*he gestures courteously toward an imaginary speaker*)—Mr. Jesse Prince, one of the most distinguished novelists of his generation, whose books are admired wherever literary works are seriously judged. I would like to add this personal comment. Some of you may not know that Mr. Prince, who was born in a Northern state, and who has spent most of his life in communities free from at least the most rabid forms of racialism still extant in our country, has chosen at just this moment

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of violence in the deep South to move down there, so as to participate with members of his race in the struggle for school integration now going on. Such an act should, I think, excite similar feelings of admiration to those elicited by real literary accomplishment. (*Pause. He lifts up his hand to restrain applause, and points to an imaginary speaker.*) I give you Mr. Jesse Prince.

JESSE PRINCE *gets down from the stool, steps away from it, returns, and mounts it again.*

Mr. Chairman, (*gesturing toward an imaginary Chairman*) Members of the Middlebury Faculty, Students, Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen: I am honored to appear before you and cannot but be gratified by the manner in which the Chairman of the evening has spoken of me to you. Nevertheless, I feel obliged to take exception to one of the remarks he made about me. Naturally I could scarcely ask for higher praise as a writer than he in his indulgence accorded me. But what I must insist on is that the motive behind my going to the deep South should not be misunderstood, and should not elicit an admiration which I certainly do not deserve. I want to state here and now, before all of you, that I did not move to the deep South with the view of participating in the struggle for school integration now going on, though I support that struggle with all my heart, and hope I am as much in favor of its being concluded successfully as anyone. Yet, I did not go South with any such aim, however laudable that aim may be. So, I must refuse the garland of virtue which the Chairman of the evening has proffered me. The fact of the matter is, Ladies and Gentlemen, that I moved to the deep South, to the state of Mississippi, to be specific, for quite another reason, not so much to fight against the blindness and backwardness of the white Southerners as, on the contrary, to absorb at first hand their outstanding and distinctive civilized qualities, their manners, and let me say it—yes, their chivalry. For the South has preserved what the North has in large measure lost—the superiority and refinement of an aristocratic order. After all, is it so strange? Why should not a member of my race aspire to something more than middle-class acceptability? May not a Negro aspire to aristocratic outlook, manners, and bearing, and given such an impulse, where else can a Negro in this country go to absorb such values except, alas, to those who were the Negro's masters, those who are today among the Negro's enemies, to the still cultivated families in the deep South?

Changing his tone, gets down from the stool, walks to the middle of the room and facing the rear door, calls out:

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How do you like that, Marianne, that's the way I'll begin my speech. It's not in the text. I just added it. What do you think? (*No answer from the room.*) Did you hear me, Marianne?

No answer. He crosses to the back and goes to the door of the room and tries it.

Marianne, can I come in? (*No answer.*) Is anything the matter? Are you displeased with me? (*No answer.*)

Enter HENRY, *tall, spare, aggressive and school-masterish, accustomed to showing authority, and to the respect of children.*

JESSE: (*cordially*) Good evening, Henry. So glad you could come over.

HENRY: (*suspiciously*) Well, you're not always so anxious for me to come over in the evening.

JESSE: Now, now, Henry, I'm very glad to have you here tonight. Suppose you sit over here.

He ushers HENRY *to one of the chairs in front of the desk.*

I'll get you a drink.

He fetches a bottle of whiskey and pours HENRY *a drink.*

HENRY: (*drinks and sighs comfortably*) Right fine sour mash. Wish I could afford the liquor you drink, Jesse.

JESSE: (*setting the bottle down near* HENRY) I've plenty in the house. Don't restrain yourself.

HENRY: (*immediately refilling his glass*) In that case I won't. (*He looks up.*) Jesse, why did you seat me over here? I think I'd be more comfortable in an easy chair.

JESSE: Stay right where you are, Henry.

He fetches a manuscript from his desk, crosses the stage to the stool, mounts it, and faces HENRY *from the other side of the room.*

HENRY: What's going on? Are you fixing to make me a speech?

JESSE: You know that this Friday I'm going to make a speech at Middlebury College in Vermont. You know that, don't you, Henry?

HENRY: You've told me that a dozen times, and Marianne has told me maybe two dozen. I'm forced to know about your speech, Jesse.

JESSE: And didn't you say that you'd like to go along to Vermont with Marianne and me?

HENRY: (*drinking*) I said just that.

JESSE: You know that my speech will be given before some of the most eminent writers of this country? Now how would you like to hear a preview of that speech, just for you?

HENRY: No, Jesse, I don't think I care much for that.

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JESSE: (*crestfallen*) But you told Marianne that you'd like to go with us to Vermont.

HENRY: That's different. In the first place, I'd like to see Vermont. And then the trip would be fun, and the night you're to give your speech I'd go to a lecture hall crowded with white folks—probably you and Marianne and I would be the only colored people there. And I'd sit down next to Marianne, maybe in the first row, and we'd watch you sitting on the platform, and maybe you'd lean over that platform and say to me, "How are you, man?" Right there in front of everybody. . . . Those are the pleasures I might expect if I could afford to make the trip with you. As for your speech, I'm sure it's fine. You wouldn't have been asked to give it if you didn't have something mighty important to say.

JESSE: (*very disappointed*) Wouldn't you listen to it now, just as a favor to me?

HENRY: (*Reflects, pours out some more sour mash, drinks, and decides against listening.*) No, Jesse, I'm afraid I'd rather not. . . . Do you know how I spend most evenings, Jesse? Looking at television . . . you know what that means? It means being talked at by all kinds of people, sometimes very distinguished people, including even the President of the United States. But it means being talked at, night after night. I turn on the set and people tell me how to brush my teeth, what cigarettes to smoke, who to vote for, and what to think about the Middle East. Now when you get talked at like that all the time, you know what happens? You get smaller and smaller, you get pushed back into your chair, and you sink deeper and deeper into it, you become an inert thing. Now I didn't come over here tonight to be talked at some more, even by you. I want to do some talking myself. I don't want to become smaller and more inert than I am already. I came here to expand, and do a little pushing against someone else—that's you, Jesse. So why don't you just sit down and have a drink with me. Has Marianne gone to bed?

JESSE: (*getting down from the stool*) Marianne? No.

HENRY: Is she reading in her room? I bet you sent her off to bed with one of your books. Tell her I'm here and want to say hello to her.

JESSE *looks uncomfortable.*

HENRY: Is anything wrong Jesse? Marianne is here, isn't she?

JESSE: I'd rather not talk about Marianne.

HENRY: You'd rather not talk! Something is wrong. (*rising*) Jesse, Marianne is here, isn't she?

JESSE: Yes.

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HENRY: Well, can't I see her?

JESSE: The fact is we had a quarrel. She's gone to bed.

HENRY: (*sitting down again*) Well, just tell her I'm here. . . . I'll fix things up between you. . . . I'm a natural-born peacemaker. . . .

JESSE: It's odd that she's angry—very odd. For no reason at all—she just flared up at me

HENRY: (*drinking*) Nothing odd about flaring up at you, Jesse. You are a very provoking man.

JESSE: (*tartly*) I thought you said you wanted to make peace?

HENRY: So I do, and so I shall. But I don't even know what this is all about.

JESSE: I suppose I could tell you.

HENRY: Who has a better right to know? . . .

JESSE: There's only one reason we ever quarrel. Marianne complains that I treat her too much like a lady, that I put her on a pedestal. . . . She finds that ridiculous. . . .

HENRY: Marianne always had common sense.

JESSE: I believe that real culture and true refinement are expressed first of all in the treatment of women. . . . The white male—in most parts of the world—has lost all feeling for courtesy: the way I've seen white women spoken to!—and in what is considered good society. Shocking. In this we see the decay of our culture.

HENRY: And you think it is up to Negroes, like yourself, to set whites an example of courteous behavior to women?

JESSE: I couldn't have expressed it better myself.

HENRY: Well, I think you are ridiculous. I agree with my sister.

JESSE: But the odd thing is that tonight she's angry with me for the exactly opposite reason. I treated her a bit roughly—sent her off on an errand—and she got roughed up a bit. She must have had a fall. Not a bad one. But her dress was torn and her cheek cut. She wouldn't even tell me what happened. Because I had been inconsiderate enough to send her on an errand for me.

HENRY: What errand?

JESSE: I sent her to post my speech to *Life Magazine*. Oh, I didn't tell you about that. I had a telegram from *Life* today. *Life* wants my speech. The speech you won't listen to is going to be read by twenty million Americans.

HENRY: (*sets down his glass and stands up*) Where'd you send her to post your speech?

JESSE: To Suttonville, that's the only place where there's a store open late. It had to be done. I couldn't go myself, and I had to send the

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speech off in a hurry, airmail. I'd just run out of postage stamps.

HENRY: Man, you're crazy.

JESSE: Crazy? What's crazy about sending Marianne out to post a manuscript?

HENRY: Don't you know what's going on around here? Do you live here in this neighborhood, or someplace up in the clouds? Don't you know that no Negro, male or female, with a bit of sense, that is, would dare go to Suttonville after dark, for anything—let alone postage stamps?

JESSE: No, I didn't know that. . . .

HENRY: Well, you just listen to me and I'll tell you.

He stoops down for the bottle and then sets it again on the floor.

You know, Jesse, that what you've told me has upset me so that I don't think I'll be able to drink any more of your sour mash. I'm that worried.

JESSE: For God's sake, Henry, what's so special about the store in Suttonville?

HENRY: Here is the information that you as a grown man were supposed to have had before you sent Marianne off on your errand: About two weeks ago, a widow, a white woman, Mrs. Parks, was raped down Suttonville way. And by a Negro. By a no-good, loafing Negro, Smiley Pete. And of course a committee was formed to have a lynching party, and of course Sam Hollis didn't want them to have that lynching party, though none of us had a good word to say for Smiley Pete. And Sam smuggled him out of the county, but he's not yet gotten him out of the state. That's why Sam Hollis looks so anxious these days. He's got plenty on his mind.

JESSE: Very interesting. But I don't see what that's got to do with Marianne.

HENRY: Here's what it's got to do with Marianne. The Widow Parks has a nephew, Young Williams, and Young Williams has stated in public that he's going to take personal vengeance on any Negro, no matter who, that dares show up after dark in Suttonville. Williams is always hanging around nights in that store where you sent Marianne, my sister, for postage stamps.

JESSE: But Henry, I don't believe that anyone would lay a hand on the wife of Jesse Prince. I'm a man of some reputation.

HENRY: That you are, Jesse, on account of your books. But let me tell you something about Young Williams. He couldn't possibly have read any of your books. He's illiterate.

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JESSE: Do you think Marianne knew—about Young Williams?

HENRY: Of course, any one would have known except you.

JESSE: Well, if she had known she would have told me about it and I wouldn't have sent her. Do you suppose anything happened to her, Henry?

HENRY: That's the sort of supposing you're supposed to be doing. You are Marianne's husband, Jesse. Have you forgotten it? Well, all right, I'll take over. I see I'd better. Now, what sort of state was she in when she came in? Did you notice anything peculiar?

JESSE: I told you, her dress was torn, and her cheek cut. And when I asked her what had happened, she didn't answer, swept into her room, closed the door and hasn't opened it or said a word to me since.

HENRY: Her cheek was cut, her dress was torn, and she went right into her room and didn't answer you and she'd been to Suttonville. Jesse, you shouldn't have sent her down there, not after dark.

JESSE: (*showing alarm*) Well, I'll find out what happened.

He goes to the door of her room.

Marianne, I must insist that you tell me whatever happened to you tonight. Don't you want to? Won't you come out now? I beg you. I'll beg you three times, that's all. Won't you come out? Won't you? Won't you?

HENRY: (*contemptuous*) Man, that's no way to get anything out of a woman. I see I'll have to show you how to do this right. (*He knocks at the door.*) Marianne, this is Henry, your brother Henry. (*He bangs at the door peremptorily.*) I insist that you come out immediately and give me a full account of everything that took place tonight. No matter how damaging the truth is to Jesse here. No need to protect him and you know I'll always protect you. (*No answer.*)

JESSE: Well, you've been no more successful than I was, Henry.

HENRY: I'll break in that door.

JESSE: That you won't, Henry. I won't let you do that. You're in my house. As a matter of fact, I'm going to show you something. I'll get Marianne to come out, just don't interfere with me. Now be quiet for just a few moments, you'll see what I'm going to do.

He gets two chairs and sets both of them in front of the door of MARIANNE*'s room, sits down in one,* HENRY *watching skeptically.* JESSE *now addresses the empty chair as if* MARIANNE *were sitting in it.*

Well, Marianne, how did you get that cut cheek, and that tear in your dress, don't you think you ought to tell me? (*A pause.*) Oh, so that's the way it was? Is that all? That's how it happened. Mmm, I

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see. And then what? (*A pause. Speaking as if he knew the whole story*) Well, in that case, Marianne, all I can say is . . . no, you can say something, talk as long as you want, I won't interrupt you. Go ahead. (*A pause.*) Oh, that's how you feel! Well my dear, darling Marianne, I knew it all the time. Now I understand the whole thing perfectly, it's all clear, all explained, wonderful (*raising his voice*) —you don't have to say one more word.

The door opens. MARIANNE *enters, dressed in a red evening gown.* JESSE *gets up from the chair, turns proudly to* HENRY.

JESSE: You see, I got her to come out.

HENRY: (*disgusted*) I don't know what you're so proud about, you haven't found out a thing. Now, ask her some questions. (*to* MARIANNE) I'm just trying to teach Jesse how to be a proper husband to you, Marianne.

JESSE: What happened to you, Marianne?

HENRY: Sister, it seems you'd been in some trouble.

MARIANNE: I'm all right, Henry. . . .

HENRY: Jesse tells me he sent you out to mail a speech of his . . . Now, did you mail it?

MARIANNE: Yes! (*A pause.*) No!

HENRY: Well, did you or didn't you?

MARIANNE: (*after a pause*) No.

HENRY: Then you must still have it. (*He looks at* JESSE.) Do you?

MARIANNE: (*after a pause*) No.

HENRY: Well, did you mail it, Marianne? That's all I'm asking you to tell me.

MARIANNE: Yes, I mailed it.

HENRY: I don't like the way you're answering me.

JESSE: I don't like the way you're questioning her, Henry. You're talking to her as if she had something to hide.

HENRY: I'm sure Marianne has something to tell that I, at least, want to hear, and right now. What happened to you, Marianne?

MARIANNE: (*Another pause.*) Oh, it was terrible. . . . I went to Suttonville and I went up into the store, and I had the letter weighed and I got the postage stamps, and just as I was leaving Young Williams—

HENRY: (*looking at* JESSE) Young Williams!

MARIANNE: Young Williams, who was standing by the door, grabbed me, he's a big man, and kissed me. I got away from him and ran out to the car, and fell and cut my cheek and tore my dress . . . He was after me and tried to hold me but I got into the car and drove back here. And that's all there was to it.

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HENRY: (*shaking his head*) Well, I wish I knew the whole truth.
JESSE: I'll thank you, Henry, to be more polite to my wife.
HENRY: You think I'm impolite?
JESSE: You're trying to suggest that Marianne's not telling the truth.
HENRY: (*turning from* JESSE) Sister, I wish I liked your story better.
JESSE: I think I'm going to have to ask you to leave, Henry.
HENRY: And I think I'm going to have to refuse your request. Otherwise nobody will ever know what happened to Marianne tonight.
JESSE: You're being presumptuous.
HENRY: And you're just a damn fool.
JESSE: Now I don't want to have to put you out, especially after I invited you here. Please go, before we quarrel.
MARIANNE: (*to* HENRY) Did I ever refuse to do anything you wanted me to, Henry?
HENRY: Not that I recollect.
MARIANNE: (*sweetly*) Then won't you do something for me?
HENRY: Why sure
MARIANNE: I mean I want you to go.
HENRY: I don't know about that.
MARIANNE: Please. Please, Henry. How do you think I feel? With two big men shouting at me and browbeating me and bullying me?
HENRY: There's only one man here able to shout at you, and browbeat you and bully you; and if he goes now, I can see you're going to be left in command of the field.

MARIANNE *sits down, covers her face and sobs.*

HENRY: Why, Marianne, you're crying.
MARIANNE: (*Raises her head, and it is evident that her sobbing has been theatrical.*) Won't you please go now, Henry, for God's sake.

HENRY *goes to the door leading to the road and turns back.*

HENRY: (*to* JESSE) Make her tell you the truth.

Exit HENRY. *We hear the sound of his car driving off. A pause.*

MARIANNE: Don't you have any questions to ask me, Jesse?
JESSE: I'm sure you can answer them, Marianne.
MARIANNE: But don't you have any questions?
JESSE: No, not right at this moment.
MARIANNE: My story satisfies you?
JESSE: (*after some consideration*) Yes.
MARIANNE: It didn't satisfy Henry.
JESSE: You wouldn't lie to me, Marianne, I know that.
MARIANNE: (*after a pause*) Wouldn't I now?
JESSE: You mean you would?

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MARIANNE: What if I had to?

JESSE: I don't expect you to ever have to lie to me. . . .

MARIANNE: And you think life is going to give you only the things you've been expecting?

JESSE: What's gotten into you, Marianne? What did happen that you haven't told me about? (*A pause. Then more sharply*) What did that man do to you?

MARIANNE: Don't you know?

JESSE: I'm beginning to see that I don't.

MARIANNE: Whatever I told you, you'd believe, because you know I wouldn't lie. So if I do have something to hide, why should I tell it?

JESSE: Whatever happened to you, Marianne, I have to know.

(*A pause.*)

MARIANNE: (*almost gaily, but with a note of hysteria*) I don't have to tell you anything. All I have to do is ask you, and you'll tell me. What happened to me tonight, Jesse, when Young Williams grabbed me? (*A pause.*) You know, because I told you, and you were satisfied that what I said is true. So tell me, honey, what happened to me tonight? Go on, say it. (*A pause.*) Tell me what you believe happened, and what you suspect, if you suspect anything. . . .

JESSE: Marianne, I don't suspect you of concealing anything or lying about anything. I believe your story just as you told it.

MARIANNE: Then tell it back to me, and let me look into your frank and honest eyes as I hear you tell my lying story.

JESSE: (*overcome*) It wasn't the truth?

MARIANNE: You know something, Jesse? I don't have to tell you the truth now. You are disqualified as a receiver of the truth. Yes, you disqualified yourself. My story was a lie, and only a liar would have believed it. Henry didn't believe my story. You know why? Because Henry doesn't lie. But you believed it, Jesse, believed it in your lying soul, and I don't owe you the true story any more, and you won't get it out of me no matter what you say or do.

JESSE: (*looking at her for a moment*) I know what's got into you, Marianne. You blame me, just as Henry did, for sending you to that part of town after dark. You blame me for that man's kiss, and for your torn dress and your bruised cheek, and for your having to fight him off and run and be afraid. . . . Yes, you blame me for all that, you want to punish me, so that's why you're trying to make me think that something else happened to you. . . . Well, blame me if it helps, and maybe you are right to blame me. Maybe I shouldn't have sent you down there. But now, tell me the truth. . . .

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MARIANNE: You really want to hear it?

JESSE: Certainly.

MARIANNE: You couldn't possibly.

JESSE: Marianne!

MARIANNE: You couldn't possibly want to hear what happened to your wife of six months, Jesse, honey!

JESSE: Let's have the whole story.

MARIANNE: (*with much coquetry*) Why don't you take me by the throat and beat the truth out of me? No, you really don't want to know. (*A pause.*) Now still less than ever. That's the only reason I want to tell it to you. If you had really wanted to find out, shouted at me, doubted me, struck me, even, I swear I think I would have spared you, Jesse. But you spared yourself, Jesse, and so I don't see why I should. . . .

JESSE: I didn't ask you to hide anything.

MARIANNE: No, but you believed whatever I told you.

JESSE: What an accusation!

MARIANNE: What happened to me tonight happened to you too, Jesse.

JESSE: For God's sake, what happened?

MARIANNE: You want the details?

JESSE: Yes, yes, yes.

As she is about to speak, he goes up to her and covers her mouth with his hand.

No, no, don't say it. Don't tell me.

MARIANNE: I've already told you. What difference do the words make?

JESSE: (*who is controlling himself with an effort*) Words make a great difference. As long as you don't actually tell me, I won't really know. You mustn't tell me. There are some things I can't afford to know, and you can't afford for me to know.

MARIANNE: You can't change what happened by not talking about it.

JESSE: Whatever happened, Marianne, will not have happened irrevocably, never to be changed, until you've said it.

MARIANNE: (*nastily*) So I felt it all along, you've just been trying to protect yourself and what happens to me doesn't matter, but only that you shouldn't hear about it, that it shouldn't be put into words. Well, I'm going to put it into words, you can't stop me.

JESSE: I warn you, Marianne. You've said so much already. Even so, I beg you—drop it. I don't want to know.

MARIANNE: You've lost any chance you ever had not to hear this story, Jesse. Just as I told you, Young Williams caught me as I was coming out of the store. (*A pause.*) What I didn't tell you is that he

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got into the car with me and drove me off the road and parked, and pulled my dress up, and hit me when I screamed, and did to me what he wanted to do. . . . (*A pause.*) And then he cried like a child and begged me to forgive him, and told me he loved me. . . . And I drove him home, and then came back here and told you the lie that you believed. . . . And it isn't only the pain and the humiliation, Jesse, no, it's not that, nor the fear, even. Something happened that can't be changed, and that's why I couldn't bear for you to try not to know about it. . . . No, it isn't just the pain. Worse, much worse, for you and for me is the pleasure—the pleasure I had of that man, and he of me. . . . So that whatever I think, whatever I do or say, I'm part of him, and he is part of me . . . and there's nothing I can do for you, Jesse, except to tell this to you.

In telling the story MARIANNE *has turned her back on* JESSE *and walked toward the extreme end of the stage to the door leading to the road. During the recital,* JESSE *has moved backward to the other end of the stage; he hears the last part of it standing with his back against the door of the room from which* MARIANNE *emerged. As* MARIANNE *concludes, she turns around to see what* JESSE*'s reaction will be. He gropes with his hand for the knob of the door, his back still towards it, finds the knob, pushes the door in, and disappears into the room.*

MARIANNE: Jesse!

She runs to the door to her room, tries it. No answer.

Well you couldn't expect that this would happen to me and that I shouldn't tell you. Jesse! (*There is no answer.*) Jesse! (*No answer.*) What are you doing, Jesse? Why don't you say something to me? And I didn't mean the last things I said. I was just trying to hurt you, because I'm hurt and all you had to say to me was that I should keep the hurt all for myself and not make you share any part of it, as if that were possible. Jesse! (*Peremptorily, stamping her foot.*) You come right out of there, right now and talk to me. You can't run away from this, just turn your back on it. But I know you, Jesse, I know you won't do that, I know you'll come out after a while and say something to me. What that will be, I can't imagine! It's frightening! Jesse, you're frightening me! I'm really more frightened now than I was before, Jesse, please!

She sits down, covers her face and begins to cry, then lifts her head.

Jesse, didn't you hear me? I was crying. Don't you care? Are you

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going to just stay in there all by yourself and let me cry all by myself? Is that how things are going to be from now on? I won't wait out here for you, Jesse. If you don't come right out, I'll go over to Henry's, just like this, without even a coat. Jesse, am I never going to see you again?

The door opens, JESSE *emerges. He has changed his clothes and is immaculate in a splendidly fitting tuxedo, with a white tie and white gloves.* MARIANNE *is startled at the apparition. She bursts out laughing hysterically.*

MARIANNE: Why, you were just changing your clothes! Where are you going, Jesse? Are we going to a party?

JESSE: (*in a state of controlled fury*) You're not going to any party, Marianne.

MARIANNE: Where are you going?

JESSE: I don't know yet. I haven't made up my mind. I'll think about it now, now that I'm dressed up. Maybe I'll think of the proper place to go and the proper thing to do under the circumstances.

He lights a cigarette, trying to give the impression of icy self-control.

You know, Marianne, one of the troubles with Negroes, and after all we're Negroes, you and I, one of the things wrong with Negroes, to take up one of my favorite topics, is that they don't know how to dress up mentally. It's worse than that, they don't know how to dress; they only know how to undress, and have taught the whole world that, but when they dress up, it's lamentable: those red blouses, (*He looks at her dress.*) those loud bright ties, those shiny yellow shoes. Might just as well be undressed altogether. How could anyone meet a real situation in life wearing clothes like that? You know something, Marianne? After you told me your story, I didn't even allow myself to think of what you said until I had put on this tuxedo. Now, maybe, with the proper coldness and formality, I can consider what you told me.

MARIANNE: (*horrified*) You just changed your clothes! I was breaking my heart out here and you were just putting on a new suit!

JESSE: Yes, I was changing my clothes, Marianne, and trying to dress my mind up too so that my thoughts about us would be fitting. And to put myself in the right frame of mind, I recalled the play I read just the other day by a great Spanish playwright, Pedro Calderon de la Barca.

He rings off the great name with perfect Spanish pronunciation

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and a pride that would be appropriate if the Spaniard had been one of his ancestors.

Let me tell you about that play, Marianne. The title of it is *Physician to His Own Dishonor,* and it tells how a Spanish nobleman acted when he began to think that his wife was deceiving him or just thinking of deceiving him, or merely regretting her marriage to him. Mind you, Marianne, he suspected her of nothing more than that. It didn't even occur to him that she might have deceived him. . . . That couldn't have happened, not to him. But he did have reason to think that she did have some feeling for another man. Now what do you think Calderon's hero did? He murdered his wife, had her murdered, that is. But notice this, Marianne, the murder had to be accomplished in such a way that there would not be the slightest suspicion of jealousy on his part, or of her having given him cause for jealousy. So he had a doctor come to the house to bleed his wife, on the pretense that she was ailing; he instructed the doctor to bleed her till she died. So the whole thing would seem an accident. And when she lay dead he dipped his hand in her blood and flattened it on the wall outside his house, explaining the mark as follows: "All professional people have signs to indicate their professions. I am physician to my own dishonor. . . ."

MARIANNE: What are you going to do to me, Jesse? Are you going to cut me up in little pieces?

JESSE: I don't know what I'm going to do yet . . . but it will come to me. . . . The important thing for you to know, Marianne, is that my sense of honor is as high and pure—and savage—as that Spanish nobleman's, as that of any man, no matter how highly placed. This is what you didn't know about me, I guess, or you wouldn't have dared tell me that story.

MARIANNE: But if you're like you say I couldn't have kept it a secret from you . . . (*pause*) . . . and I think I could have easily. . . .

JESSE: So you think I don't mean what I say. You think I'm pretending. . . .

MARIANNE: I hope you're not pretending.

JESSE: You'd better hope I am. . . . You know what I'm going to do after all, Marianne? (*A pause.*) It's very simple. I'm going to do what almost any white man in this state would do if his wife were raped by a nigger. . . . I'm going to get some of the boys and we'll drive over tonight to Young Williams's place and take him out and hang him. That's what I'm going to do, Marianne. Don't you see now that you should have been afraid to tell me?

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MARIANNE: Hang him? Young Williams?

JESSE: Hang him.

MARIANNE: You can't do that!

JESSE: We'll see about that.

MARIANNE: You're mad, Jesse. . . . (*A pause.*)

JESSE: (*pacing the room*) Mad, eh, because I want the same satisfaction a white man would want if a nigger had taken his wife! Mad, eh? We'll see about that. . . . No, it's never been done before in this or in any state of the South, never has a white man had to pay like that for touching a colored girl. . . . Well, it had to happen some time. . . . And if I can't take pride in my wife now, at least I'll be able to take pride in the lengths to which I am willing to go for her, and for my race. . . . (*He yields to the idea more and more, and, delighted with it, becomes more intense.*) Yes, we'll hang Young Williams. . . . (*A pause.*) Here Williams, we've got your house surrounded. This is Jesse Prince speaking. That's right, Jesse Prince. . . . You've heard of him and you know his wife. Well, that's what you're going to have to pay for now, for knowing Jesse Prince's wife. . . . I've got Sam Hollis with me and Hardy Jones and Al Murray, and we're all of us armed. Come out now quiely or we'll go in and get you. No use trying to telephone for help. We've cut the wires! Nothing you can do now but suffer for a while, like many a poor nigger has been made to suffer, and for less than you did. . . . Come out, Young Williams! Come out, you big white buck. . . ! Come out and pay for meddling with the wifely honor of a colonial lady! We've got the gas to burn you with and a whip to split your back and a fine rope to break your neck, after our other attentions. I promise you that whatever has been done to a nigger, that will now be done to you. . . .

MARIANNE: Have you gone out of your mind?

JESSE: Who knows? Anyway, that's the way it is. That is what is going to happen. I'll just ring up Sam Hollis and get him to pick up Al Murray and Hardy Jones.

He moves toward the telephone on the desk, pushing MARIANNE *aside.*

Out of my way, Woman. Did you think you could tell me a story like that and that I'd just write it off to bad luck and the indignities regularly done my race . . .? No, Marianne . . . you just didn't understand me if you thought that. . . .

MARIANNE: But you can't lynch a white man. (*A pause.*) I don't want you to lynch Young Williams. . . . I don't want you to, Jesse.

JESSE: I'll answer you with the words of a noble Negro in literature,

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one of the very few with real Negro nobility, Othello:

". . . my bloody thoughts with violent pace
Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love,
'Til that a capable and wide revenge
Swallow them up."

MARIANNE: Do you know what would happen if you did lynch Young Williams? There'd be beatings and hangings and sudden death to everybody we know. . . . There'd be a massacre of every Negro family in the neighborhood.

JESSE: (*enjoying the prospect*) This whole area may be a place of desolation!

MARIANNE: You can't do that.

JESSE: There would be reprisals and retaliations, and then retaliation on the retaliators!

MARIANNE: Is that what you want?

JESSE: I'll answer you with another line of poetry from Othello: "Oh, the pity of it," Marianne, "Oh, the pity of it!"

He picks up the telephone book and consults it.

MARIANNE: No!

JESSE: Let's see . . . Sam Hollis. Here's the number.

He takes up the phone.

MARIANNE: Jesse!

JESSE: No more arguments!

MARIANNE: I know Sam Hollis well, Jesse . . . he's a practical man. You'll never get him to do what you want. You'll just make a fool of yourself!

JESSE: (*condescendingly*) I think I have some importance among Negroes, even down here, and some power to persuade, too. . . .

MARIANNE: Sam Hollis will never agree to a lynching. . . .All you'll accomplish will be to ruin my reputation. . . . I won't be able to show my face anywhere. . . .

JESSE: And what about me? If I don't do this, will I be able to face myself?

He begins to dial the number.

MARIANNE: Jesse Prince, you put down that phone! (*pleading*) Just for a minute. Please. You've got to hear what I'll do if you dial that number.

He puts down the phone. A pause.

JESSE: I'm waiting.

MARIANNE: If you dial that number—I'll go back to Young Williams. . . . He said he'd wait up all night for me to come. . . .

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JESSE: You must want to go back to him!

MARIANNE: The point is that when Sam Hollis and his men get here, you won't be able to tell them a thing. . . . You'll be too ashamed. . . .

JESSE: You wouldn't. . . .

MARIANNE: I swear to you that's just what I'll do.

JESSE: And I won't be threatened. . . .

He dials the number.

MARIANNE: (*shrilly*) I'm warning you, Jesse.

JESSE: (*turning his back to her*) Hello? Is this Sam Hollis? This is Jesse Prince speaking. . . .

MARIANNE *rushes into the bedroom, returns with her purse, takes out her lipstick and powder and makes up with her back to the audience throughout* JESSE*'s telephone conversation.*

I know it's late and I know you're busy, and I wouldn't have called if it weren't urgent. . . . I want your help tonight in what may be the most important action ever undertaken by a Negro in the South. . . . Yes, tonight. . . . Yes, now! (*A pause.*) Yes, I want you to bring Al Murray and Hardy Jones. I know they're your best men. And come armed. . . . Yes, of course. . . . I had to be sure that you would be prepared. . . . I can't say any more over the phone. . . . I'll be expecting you, then. . . . Goodbye, Sam. . . .

HE replaces the receiver and turns to MARIANNE. MARIANNE *turns around and faces him, and she completes her lipsticking.*

MARIANNE: You know what you've done? You've sent me back to him. Jesse, you've sent me back to Young Williams.

She goes out. JESSE *is overcome. We hear the motor of a car starting.* JESSE *gets up and rushes to the door.*

JESSE: (*calling*) Marianne, Marianne!

We hear the car drive away.

CURTAIN*

* This excerpt is the first act of a two-act play.

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POEMS

O FLODDEN FIELD *

to the memory of Edwin Muir

The learned King fought
like a fool, flanked
and out-tricked, who hacked
in a corner of cousins
until the ten thousand
swords lay broken,
and the women walked
in their houses alone.

On a journey among horses,
the spirit of a man who died
only a week ago
is walking through heather
and forgets that its body
had seventy years.
The wild horses are singing,
and the voices of the rocks.

The spirit from the bone-yard
finds a new life, in the field
where the King's wound
built the blackness of Glasgow
and the smoke of the air.
The spirit, like a boy,
picks up from the heather
a whole sword.

Donald Hall

* Note: The Battle of Flodden took place in September 8, 1408; King James I of Scotland, whose court was among the most learned in Europe and included Dunbar and Douglas, lost his entire army and his own life. The result of the battle was English dominance and the perpetual poverty of Scotland; at the site of the battle is a stone on which the Scots have written only, "O Flodden Field."

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DEAD DRUNK

In Memoriam William Cannastra, 1924-1950

For Winifred Gregoire

1

And the muddy glasses on the floor stinking of stale beer and smelly red wine
And the wreath of crisp dead ivy decorating the loft floor grave
And the senile remains of a rice and lamb hearts casserole on top of the great rusty stove
And a welter of theologians and script girls on the huge triple bed in the come that confounds the just and the apathetic
And the garbage man sleeping alone on a little truckle bed in the corner
And the hum of the Hi-Fi nobody remembered to switch off
And the smashed victrola record sprawling helpless at the foot of many accusing intact albums
And the indefatigable book reviewer sucking a spent athlete on an off-center divan
And the eyeglasses the empty bottles the books the draughtsman's tools the blank sheets of paper the dead letters
And the host supine staring brown-eyed at the Everest ceiling of his over-tenanted loft.

2

But once the ivy lived
Wrapping the warm brown naked body in tendrils of vivacious green
As it danced through gray and hostile streets
Joy to the world or at least
The moment's festivity,
Pan.

For pipes a gramophone
Glasses for hoofs keynote a face that entices all the others' need
To be tender, hot, expansive to
Giveless mirages that crave
And crave in a vacuum
Graves.

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Wild the gestures, liquid muscles, rippling eyes and a voice that is so
alone with you in a room that sometimes even you aren't there:
But all in vain,
The great god Pan is dead.

3

Let the sluices and sloshes of goblets and bottles lap high,
Let the air
Churn and gurgle with waves of poured liquids and vinous good
feeling
As we reeling
From one bar to another in search of a brother get lost
In an early fall frost.
For in spite of our prancing and Corybant dancing as lamsters from
care
The trains rattle by
And the choleric sky
As we lean out the moving subway car's window
Toward the iron stancheon and its splattered future of our blobs of
blood and brain
Has decreed and glaring still decrees that we die.

Alan Ansen

IN THE DARK

I wandered in my mind as in the dark.
I stumbled over a chair, ran into a wall
Or another wall, I wandered down a hall
And into another room, the same as before.
I stumbled against a wall, I felt the floor
Carefully with each foot, I found a door
And went into another room, the same as before.
I wandered in my mind, I was in the dark.
I sidled up against another wall,
I shouldered along it, searching for a door,
And found one, opening out into a hall
That led to another room, the same as before.
In fear I tuned my voice to a little tune,

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A crazy tune that sang inside my head,
And followed the tune as one would follow a thread
That leads one to or from a minotaur.
And that tune led me back or forward mazily,
That sang inside my head so crazily!

I followed or fled at last into a hall
That had a little light. Down at the end
Of the hall, a long way off, two windows were,
And into the windows came a little light.
I followed down that hall as to a friend
Long since offended. Timidly I wore
An anxious smile, eager to please. The light
Grew brighter still till at last to the end
Of the hall I came. What a wonderful sight!
I found that I was looking through my eyes!
Outside of myself what a beautiful landscape lies!

David Ferry

THE BOLT

As we awaken recounting the night's pleasure,
How the jewelled brooch from your breasts, and the chain from your wrist
Fell open, how full nakedness was without measure,
The dark river runs through the bright snow
And the trees awakening crack their shells with a twist
Dropping their delicate brilliants as the cold winds blow.
Did you weep, or did I dream you wept?
I saw a star fall flaming into the crypt
Of the air when we two were all gold.
Were we so beaten thin we could but shine
To one another, and still lie very cold?
All night under our window a dog was biting a bone.
Love is like a ladder to the moon.
Love is what I want. May it come soon.
We've almost touched. Love, it was very good,
Though the house was blown through by the wind like a bush in a wood.

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And yet our star has perished on the air.
We are but one another's dearest care.
We are not naked yet.
We're veiled. We've but conversed,
Singing across a valley from far slope to slope
With a river dark between, and cold as hope.
Where is the bolt can hold our earth to earth,
Clinch roof to wall with a resistless prize?
Where is the stronger birth
Than this we practise? I have a vision
Of a bolt that pierces all the veils, and bears
End to end of the world on its black shank.
Now let the bolt shore up this old house tight,
And this cold day be our so luminous night,
Oh, let us for once be wise.

Allen Grossman

TO MY WIFE

And does the heart grow old? You know
In the indiscriminate green
Of summer or in earliest snow
A landscape is another scene,

Inchoate and anonymous,
And every rock and bush and drift
As our affections alter us
Will alter with the season's shift.

So love by love we come at last,
As through the exclusions of a rhyme,
Or the exactions of a past,
To the simplicity of time,

The antiquity of grace, where yet
We live in terror and delight
With love as quiet as regret
And love like anger in the night.

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THREE EPITAPHS

1.

My name is Ebenezer Brown.
I carted all the trash of town
For sixty years. On the last day
I trust my Lord will cart me away.

2.

I married in my youth a wife.
She was my own, my very first.
She gave the best years of her life.
I hope nobody gets the worst.

3.

Here lies New Critic who would fox us
With his poetic paradoxes.
Though he lies here rigid and quiet,
If he could speak he would deny it.

THREE WOMEN

1. *Bride*

Bride loved old words, and found her pleasure marred
On the first night, her expectations jarred,
And thirty inches short of being a yard.

2. *Career*

Career was feminine, resourceful, clever.
You'd never guess to see her she felt ever
By a male world oppressed. How much they weigh!
Even her hand disturbed her as she lay.

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3. *The Fay*

Your affair, my dear, need not be a mess.
See at the next table with what finesse,
With what witty tensions and what tense wit,
As intricate as courtship, the love-fated
Sir Gawain and the Fay at lunch commit
Faithful adultery unconsummated.

J. V. Cunningham

I WANT, I WANT

Open-mouthed, the baby god
Immense, bald, though baby-headed,
Cried out for the mother's dug.
The dry volcanoes cracked and spit,

Sand abraded the milkless lip.
Cried then for the father's blood
Who set wasp, wolf and shark to work,
Engineered the gannet's beak.

Dry-eyed, the inveterate patriarch
Raised his men of skin and bone,
Barbs on the crown of gilded wire,
Thorns on the bloody rose stem.

Sylvia Plath

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BREAD AND ONIONS

Almost happy today, we lie
Watching the jets deploy so high
They are simply motion and no sound,
And all we hear is close to ground:
Wasp, cicada, and blue-fly,
And now and then the osprey's cry.

Our picnic bag lies at your head:
Two onions, half a pound of bread,
A paper of cream cheese, a blue
Cucumber sweating icy dew.
And wingy things ply forth and back
With news of our egregious snack.

However well our kisses taste,
By each of them we are defaced.
It's politics we'll have to thank
If you remain a lively, lank
Girl in striped blouse forever, I
Not unfit in your arms to lie.

Or, at the narcissistic worst,
By politics we'll have been cursed
When I am fingering twenty hairs
And you are fat and full of prayers.
And who, my ouzel, witch and star,
Will know us then for what we are?

None of which gives me, it is true,
The right one button to undo,
And nothing in the zenith flies
To teach us where our honor lies.
Yet heavy on the tilting ground
We'll move, and add one further sound.

Adrienne Rich

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Louis Kronenberger

HIGHBROWS AND THE THEATER TODAY

Some Notes and Queries

Seven or eight years ago, when the Jean-Louis Barrault company came from Paris to give Broadway its first general taste in years of distinguished French theater and acting, several of my literary friends, who ordinarily never went to the theater at all, planned to make an exception of the Barrault troupe—indeed, bought tickets well in advance for what, to a man, they particularly wanted to see. And what they particularly wanted to see was Gide's adaptation of Kafka's *The Trial*; and after seeing it, they all felt considerably let down and didn't so much as think of going to anything else.

The incident interested me then, and has recurred to me at intervals ever since. I couldn't help wondering why, when for the first time in years a notable French company visited America, my very cultivated literary friends should pass over Marivaux or Molière in favor of an adaptation into French of a novel written in German that they themselves had read in English. Or rather I didn't really wonder at all. What my friends had done was just what I would have supposed they would do. For one thing, of course, Kafka and Gide were very much part of their cultural life. For another thing, the theater as such was no part of their cultural life at all; they had small interest in acting as acting, or even in plays as plays. As burnt children, they never—in that pre-Off-Broadway era—went near a theater charred for them with disappointments. But all this, it seemed to me, was not quite the whole of it. That my friends had lost interest in the theater, as Broadway represented the theater, was almost wholly the theater's fault and very little their own. But that—to the extent of preferring a dramatization of *The Trial*—they had lost interest in the theater, as Molière represented the theater, seemed rather

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to reflect on them. It made them, surely, parochial, if not in their backgrounds, then in their interests; but more crucially, it exposed something a little impurely intellectualized and not genuinely esthetic in their tastes. Molière and Marivaux did not mean enough for them to go and see because, plainly, they did not mean enough in themselves. They lacked "significance," they had no particular cerebral content, no *Zeitgeistish* flourishes or sociological facets. They merely offered rather simple works of art—the kind of thing that a talented French theater group might render to perfection.

I suppose what interested me most, however, was neither what was parochial in my friends nor what was too modern-minded, but what seemed naive: their not grasping in advance that they would feel let down; their not knowing that adapting novels for the stage—beyond resembling the very kind of vulgarization that highbrows are the first to decry—means involving two media that, whatever their surface likenesses, are naturally alien and hostile to each other. But if the incident gave me a certain mild *Schadenfreude,* it gave me cause in the end for reflection as well. For in the end what stood out was how, owing to the theater's own general thinness and patness and vulgarity, highbrows had so lost the sense of the theater that when they did go to it, it seemed for the wrong reasons—even at the particular moment when they might have gone for the right ones.

I don't want to generalize too broadly; but among intellectuals in America, and in particular among what I can most conveniently call literary highbrows, the theater has come to occupy little if any place. By that I mean that they do not go to the theater in anything like the same spirit, or with anything like the same regularity, that they go to concerts or art shows, to the ballet or the opera. (This perhaps varies somewhat in inverse proportion to how far away they live from New York.) And when they do go, it is hardly ever for purely theater reasons: it is for what else matters, as much in John Osborne as in Shakespeare; or because a poet like Eliot or a novelist like Graham Greene has turned playwright; or because a foreign theater name—Lorca, Sartre, Brecht, Beckett—has traveled up to them along literary channels. My point, at any rate, is that, whether or not they take an occasional swig of Tennessee Williams or Arthur Miller, there is no more personal incentive to "keep up" with the theater than there is a cultural obligation; there is no "new" work

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by anyone writing primarily for the stage that corresponds to a new Faulkner or Eliot or Stravinsky or Balanchine. Equally there has been no new theater movement to capture their interest, any more at the level of beatnik literature than of abstract painting. (Perhaps Method acting has aroused a certain casual, rather amused curiosity.)

This general attitude was well manifested, right in *PR,* by Saul Bellow when, as a for-the-nonce drama critic, he took the good-humoredly dismissive squint at the theater that he might have taken at penny arcades—except that penny arcades would very probably have interested him more, as examples of mass culture or of sexual Americana. And just this is the rather interesting reverse side of the situation: that literary highbrows, equally with excluding the theater from the world of art and high culture that includes belles-lettres, music, painting or ballet, dismiss it from the world of sociology and mass culture that includes TV, science fiction, comic-strips and jazz. For intellectuals generally, the theater has no more of a crude fascination than it has serious interest; it no more disquiets than it reassures them; it no more seems part of the problems of society than of the satisfactions of art. They don't even jeer at its trashiness or guffaw at its artiness; they are not even, in any overtly hostile or indignant sense, anti-theater. They are simply, all in all, non-theater-going. They show apathy toward Broadway rather than antipathy; it is bracketed in their minds less with the sort of fiction or music or painting they dislike than with a kind of bourgeois culture they are miles removed from—Womrath's or Westchester, Town Hall lectures or bridge. My literary friends don't say to me, "Should I go see This-or-That?": they say, all too hopefully, "I don't need to see This-or-That, do I?"

And except on rare occasions, my answer is "No." There is very little that, in terms of artistic merit or even social or intellectual value, they need to see. There is a little more—but not really very much—of which I might say, "O reason not the need—go for the theatrical excitement, or the production qualities, or the sheer fun of it." But in a frighteningly large number of cases there is no need, almost no reason, to go at all. Surely they needn't—what with what sitters and taxis will cost—pay twenty dollars for an engrossing first act, or for *frissons* and fireworks, or even for some scattered good writing or observation. Too often, moreover—even in the course of one of

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Broadway's better evenings—it is not simply, as with any art, that the pace slackens or the plot slumps: too often, there emerges something ruinously flashy or shamelessly vulgarized; or there is the sense of some rusted field-piece out of battles long ago. Amid the honest intentions of an Arthur Laurents's *A Clearing in the Woods,* which is most depressing?—his attempting a kind of crude stream-of-consciousness so late in the day; or in so wrong and resistant a medium; or with such uneven and limited gifts.

As for what is flashy and vulgarized, there is of course danger in the medium of the theater itself, with its inherent need for vivid effects, its innate demand for powerful emotions, its needing (on technical grounds) to resort to tricks, its having (in the intellectual sense) to smack of triteness. All too often the theater, in any strict artistic view, corrupts; and the commercial theater corrupts catastrophically. Rare enough is what might be called a fine theater mind, and rarer by far a fine theater mind that is also a pure one. On the current Broadway scene, moreover, the gifted theater minds with the greatest power are more often interpretative than creative, more often directors than playwrights. And if directors like Joshua Logan and, far more impressively, Elia Kazan, have themselves a touch of genius, they can sometimes constitute the theater's evil genius as well. They give the impression of taking over, of reshaping what they direct, as a music or opera conductor, as a publishing house editor, would almost never do; and so we get a *Picnic* or a *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* that bears too vividly, in a kind of purple ink, their signature. Indeed, Mr. Kazan's staging of Tennessee Williams's plays increasingly suggests that when author and director have equally a very strong theater sense, the effect is of Pelion on Ossa, of something damagingly vivid; instead of the restraining hand and cooler tones that Mr. Williams needs, his own sensationalizing of his material seems further sensationalized.

Again, all too much of the better side of Broadway is a matter of gimmicks, or of works adapted from other mediums, or re-angled from other eras. And it is not even that much of this is largely a matter of cleverness, it is that the underbelly of the cleverness is so streaked with compromise; that it is invalid in the very degree that it is ingenious; that the very process of most play-production today—of producers, co-producers, backers, directors, last-minute "collabora-

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tors" and out-of-town rewrites—involves not only too many cooks, but too many poisoners. The problem, for one example, of making a play or book into a serious musical differs tremendously from that of making it into an outright opera. For, in the case of the opera, it is fundamental, it is taken for granted, that the music comes first —which clarifies not just the terms of the adaptation but metamorphoses the whole nature of the effect. But with the serious musical drama, what is attempted is some sort of equality between text and music, some sort of William-and-Mary joint reign (as though with even the actual William and Mary, William were not given the executive power!) Hence the result of attempting a "balanced" effect between text and score is again and again a divided house or a split personality.

Because of its own adulterating methods, and its show-business economics that pay court to bourgeois tastes and defer to popular prejudices, the theater is a place where milk rises to the top, often only the faster for being curdled. Hence there is constant, rather desperate novelty, but little that is new; much concern for façade and décor, and little that is solid. Most of the theater is simply a catering service, and not even for the Best People. Moreover, the born playwright—even when as passionate and independent-minded as an O'Neill—is all too frequently anything but a born writer. Nowhere so quickly as in our prose drama does language date or come to seem stiff or grandiloquent or hackneyed. How far back beyond O'Neill —himself sadly vulnerable—can we find in English any prose drama even marginally alive? Not surely in Galsworthy, let alone a *Second Mrs. Tanqueray*; and only so far as it smacks of comedy in Shaw's early problem plays. In the face of this, poetic drama is not just a literary luxury or a highbrow desideratum for our theater; it alone would seem to have real staying power; in it alone can drama's rather quick-rusting machinery be offset by a continuing vigor of language. Even in brand new prose drama what so often tends to disappoint literary people is the quality of the writing: where it doesn't seem pretentious or derivative, it seems fibreless and flat. It is on this account all the greater pity that in America we do not compensate for middling good drama with superior high comedy and satire; that, instead, the middling good drama proves the better product of the two. Indeed, if we would learn where the professional

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American theater stands, what the Best of Broadway can mean, we have only to compare what the 'fifties have produced—whatever their limitations—by way of new American poets or novelists or painters with what they have produced in new playwrights. The only new playwright of any note with a body of work behind him is William Inge—someone who, beginning with a certain real feeling for lostness in people, for inarticulate and fumbled lives, has grown more facile in manner and sentimental in effect, till a feeling for lostness has been largely dissolved in a sense of mere softness.

2

And yet, though highbrows may be quite right, by scrupulous standards, to show the theater their backs, I'm not sure that what seems quite right seems at the same time quite natural; I'm not sure that because playgoing today is no real cultural obligation for them, that can explain why, with highbrows, it has failed of all fascination and lure. No doubt the explanation lies in something more than the disappointing quality of the plays; no doubt it lies, for one thing, in what trouble one must go to, what prices one must pay, to be disappointed; and for another thing—as against the extremely long odds of playgoing—in the far surer satisfactions to be had in concerts or ballet or long-playing records. Yet, even after making the case stronger, I'm left wondering a little at the dying out of so immemorial and universal a lure; at highbrows' ceasing to care, quite beyond how little the theater may currently offer, for the world of the theater itself. I don't mean this in the banal romantic sense of that famous expectant hush that comes over the theater as the lights go down, or of man's irrepressible craving for make-believe; though what I do mean does involve something romantic in us, something a little naively susceptible. It has certainly to do with how we respond, or for that matter surrender, to visual action or resonant speech; to performers physically creating drama before our eyes, or to incidents that cunningly heighten suspense. In all this—now in sophisticated ways, now in primitive ones—something crafty is at work, something that brings out the child, the simpleton, the savage in us; and that brings out, again, the inheritor of long and complex traditions. Of all media dependent upon language, the theater has always been the one most capable of fierce intensity; indeed intensity, rather than reality, is the

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essence, the high merit, of stage drama. Again, of all visual effects in the arts, great acting is perhaps the most immediately compelling: not holding us, like painting and sculpture, in any trance of mystery or wonder; but rather in a vise of taut feeling or excitement, a vise that often owes something to demagoguery as well as adroitness. And in the same way the theater has its wide nets to spread, its great powers to exert, for laughter, from low clowning to high comedy. Even intellectuals not the slightest bit stage-struck have always found a peculiar pleasure in the stage; and all the more, at times, because what commonly made it inferior to other arts made it unique as well; all the more because it traded subtle persuasions for smashing blows, or disdained the lancet for the broadsword. In the 'twenties—when, for young highbrows, not only were the Hemingways and Faulkners emerging, but Joyce, Proust, Lawrence, Eliot, the later Yeats were new and academically quite unsanctified—the very richness of literature somehow enhanced the shallower appeal, the livelier enjoyment of the stage. The stage itself, to be sure, was far more promising; but so were the 'twenties far more adventurous and unself-conscious, not always comically fearful of mistaking sheep for goats, not obsessed with labels and laboratory tests.

What I suspect has done something to separate highbrows from the theater—not to the extent that it could have done so single-handed, but certainly as it could have done so in concert with the theater's own grave deficiencies—is the prevailing nature, today, of highbrowism itself. And what today is peculiar to it seems less a matter of response than of approach; has less to do with the rightness of its judgments than with its intense concern for being right. Never—it must certainly be said in defense of such an approach—have highbrows been more called upon to expose and on occasion excoriate the incursions of middlebrow taste, the infiltrations of solemn *Kitsch,* the adulterations of popularized sociology and psychoanalysis. But never, either, have highbrows seemed so humorlessly rigid in their distinctions—being not just purists but panicky segregationists, acting as though there weren't goat's blood along with sheep's in half the immortals—in Dickens and Jane Austen, Defoe and George Eliot, Richardson, Dr. Johnson, Tennyson, Frost*; or as though, in the end, the ivory tower and the walled town had not as measurable draw-

* And how many of these were, not so very long ago, being outlawed or depreciated!

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backs as the dreary suburb or the city streets. The immoderate degree to which today's theater is mongrel and vulgar is perhaps balanced by today's fetishist and rigid highbrowism.

But it is not just this that disinclines the highbrow toward the theater; it is equally—despite all its purism—something in the highbrow approach that itself is impure. For, in an odd way, highbrow touchstones have become in actual practice more often intellectual than esthetic; more often critical than creative; more often concerned with "significance" than with distinction, and with complex ambivalence than with fairly simple truth. The attitude I speak of is not even so naturally intellectual as it is determinedly intellectualized. As a result, how interesting—in a world of multiple symbols and simultaneous levels of meaning—can the theater, with its inevitable simplifications, hope to be? In a world of close readings and minute analyses, how rewarding is playgoing—where so much has to be taken on the run—likely to seem? If it is the fault of the theater that it seizes on what is topical in a spirit so much more journalistic than intellectual, this in a sense is yet a function of the theater also. Ibsen, still supreme for airing the social issues and problems of an era, was not just asserting the artist's role; he was surely speaking for the publicist and commentator as well, when he said it was his business to ask questions, not provide answers; and even today very often, with considerable vigor, the theater assembles the issues and puts the questions. But in dramatizing rather than documenting them, in condensing them into headlines rather than dissecting them with footnotes, in giving them an emotional charge rather than an intellectual cogency, the virtues of its method are as abhorrent to the current highbrow approach as are the obvious and often truly horrifying vices. In an age that too often sees art as excavation, an age for whom the best-quality meat is apparently that which needs to be chewed the longest, and for whom all sauces and seasonings are a form not of piquancy but of taint, the theater may perhaps be as often cold-shouldered for what is enticing about it as for what is repellent. F. L. Lucas tells of a girl student at Cambridge who, when asked by her tutor whether she had enjoyed a book under discussion, answered: "I don't read to enjoy; I read to evaluate." If her attitude is seldom set forth in so monstrous an antithesis, it can boast all the same very widespread favor.

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Certainly most literary highbrows did enjoy the theater once, in days when Evaluation's shadow failed to intrude on every aspect of enjoyment, and when there flourished a greater catholicity, and even eccentricity, of taste. (In those days, highbrows themselves were more likely referred to as "civilized," or as people of sensibility.) And perhaps their feet were on firmer ground, even if they breathed a less rarefied air, when they would have set Molière above a dramatization of *The Trial*; perhaps they boasted opener esthetic pores if not quite such patrician blood when they would have preferred a Molnar trifle or a new George Kelly comedy or an evening with Ina Claire to reading five new critiques on Melville. With current highbrow culture there exists a kind of pre-Copernican cosmology in which the world comes to seem more flat than round, with all "civilization" clustered about a figurative Mediterranean; and even though most of the theater's regions are unhappily Bad Lands, that does not justify their remaining unknown and unexplored. For much, after all, of what is suspect about the theater is also natural to it. The remark that is said to have been made to Shaw, "What you don't like about the theater is that it is theatrical" is something that all of us who are essentially literary in our responses and sensibilities must cry *touché* to. Certainly we do right to distrust the demagogue that often lurks inside the dramatist, but is it not, a little, the pedagogue inside us that proves distrustful? Intellectuals inevitably and rightly reflect on what they have seen or heard or read, and nowhere can one have more troubling and mistrustful afterthoughts about emotional concurrence than with plays. So often it was not the play that moved us, but only the performance; it was not the motive that convinced us, but only the playwright's skillfully timed use of it. It is the essence of the theater to stifle reflection under the stress of emotion; hence afterthoughts will emerge in the most trampling and retributive form, extinguishing flames with cerebral ice water.

At such times one can only, as with oratory or band music, acknowledge what is unscrupulously seductive and set plus against minus—the degree to which a superb performance compensates for a suspect play; the degree to which theatricality must be accepted as a natural enemy of truth, or Sarah Bernhardt as incompatible with cerebration. And there is the somewhat different question that presents itself in any medium, in every art, of how far we must put up

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with what is lacking or wrong for the sake of what is special and splendid—the problem (to use larger names than any in the theater at the moment) with Macaulay or Tchaikowsky or Swinburne.

But—and perhaps it is only here that highbrows today are really vulnerable—the theater, as either a significant part of our culture or a rewarding source of enjoyment, is not just the Tennessee Williamses or William Inges. If names like these represent the current theater where it has thematic or sociological relevance, they equally represent it where it comes closest to being like fiction, to resembling "literature." And where our current theater seems intellectually most relevant is not where it may be artistically most rewarding. Where it comes closest to fiction, on fiction's terms, is where it may lag most noticeably behind it. We should not forget that the novel partly came into being from the inability of the stage to cope with what was particularly inward in thought and feeling, or to handle compactly what was extensive in space and time; that, with good reason, again, Aristotle made plot the essential factor in drama, where increasingly the nature of man and society has held first place in fiction. My own feeling is that there would be higher rewards in the theater, and greater hopes for it, if it became less "intellectual," less topical, less barnacled with problems than it is at present; if, in terms of interest and impact, it moved farther away from fiction and closer to poetry, if it sought to be expressive rather than illustrative. Certainly the two most satisfying "theater" occasions, for me, in New York last season were *The Seven Deadly Sins,* performed with all the accoutrements of ballet at the City Center, and the medieval *Play of Daniel,* performed with all the atmosphere of religion in a church.

Highbrows tend, too, and for fairly similar reasons, to disregard the theater on its comic side. Here they bring to the theater an attitude they seem to manifest generally: they often seem to me to care less about how funny, so to speak, a writer may be than about what he is laughing at; they make, too, what seems to me the capital blunder of regarding satire as a greater form than comedy; of not realizing that, as opposed to satire's need to take sides and seem superior, comedy is above the battle, is relentlessly, even menacingly, disinterested—as likely to show up the right side as the wrong, to catch out the hero as the villain. Comedy no more exempts Mr. Bennet than Mr. Collins, Falstaff than Shallow, Uncle Vanya than the Professor.

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Even smaller-scale comedy can be superbly exhilarating. Such things as Jerome Robbins's best theater ballets, as *The Chalk Garden* or *My Fair Lady* or *La Plume de Ma Tante* show what the theater can do handsomely and in a sense uniquely. The "Rain in Spain" number of *My Fair Lady,* the monks-with-their-bellropes number in *La Plume de Ma Tante* are charmingly successful by any standards I know.

3

In all this I have no thesis to expound; I have speculated on the relationship—or the lack of one—between the highbrow literary world and the contemporary theater because if it is as tenuous as I think, there is perhaps some point in trying to find out why—even if a most potent cause, the theater's having so little of distinction to offer, is obvious. In all this, moreover, I myself can only plead guilty to some of my allegations about others. I too am strongly literary-minded, and perhaps too much put off by what is vulgarized in the theater, and made uneasy by what is theatrical. But I hope that, for all that, I am aware that the stage has a special, reverberant voice, or art, or artifice, and has qualities that must be accepted on their own terms. I'm aware, too, that the theater can offer greater momentary satisfactions than most of us would critically allow—greater ones, perhaps, than a strict critical sense is able to allow. Just here we come upon a certain doubtful element, not in the theater alone but in all things that, to a very marked degree, are "fascinating," that have an element that can smack of hypnotism or narcotics or sleight-of-hand, and that can create an unnatural or night-lighted vividness. To what extent, that is to say, can what is unduly fascinating be altogether "valid"? To what extent—in order to enjoy it—must there be not so much a critical as a temperamental assent? Fascinating, in any case, the theater surely can be; and if there is slight desire, among our better writers, to go to the theater, there is often a strong desire to write for it. Such writers are attracted by the peculiar power and directness of the medium, though I'm not sure just how aware many of them are of the difficulties. (Whatever their limitations otherwise, an Eliot and a Graham Greene, besides starting off with a certain theater sense, have had enough humility of sorts to set about patiently learning their trade. Against this, too many in-

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tellectual critics, far from having any sense of the theater, haven't even a sense of the theater's problems.)

Which brings up the fact that, except where plays have taken on an extra-theatrical interest, the contemporary theater has been all but ignored in general American highbrow criticism. Those who *have* written such criticism—an Eric Bentley, a Mary McCarthy, a Francis Fergusson—have done so out of a particular, long-manifested interest in the theater itself; and even of them, what with Miss McCarthy having other, often more urgent interests and with Mr. Fergusson strongly concerned with the high drama of the past, only Mr. Bentley has written steadily out of wide contemporary knowledge: so much so as to become fully identified with drama criticism itself. As it happens, the participating interest that he has aroused has come rather from the academic than the literary world. And it is indeed young professors—with no defined creative or literary interests—who have begun to write theater criticism in their turn. This is logical enough, if only because it is in the colleges—with their drama courses on the one hand and their student productions on the other—that the theater retains a classic appeal. Again, the theater, from being neglected by literary critics, offers young academics a particular opportunity. And the criticism they are writing has its value, though more as an offset to journalistic play-coverage than as a creator of highly cultivated audiences.

Just how such audiences can be created—other than by some improbably magnificent efflorescence of dramatic talent—is an important but rather frustrating problem. Having set down miscellaneous notes on the subject in hand, I can only end up with some miscellaneous queries. Perhaps the most crucial one is to what extent there must be a change in the highbrow attitude, and what (assuming no magnificent efflorescence) could bring it about. How much would an *affirmative* interest in the current theater, on the part of a few influential literary and cultural critics, help? How much would the emergence of a few genuinely creative playwrights? (Off-Broadway, thus far, whatever its value for already existing modern work, has offered little new work of any distinction.) Could a first-rate repertory theater change the climate? Could a single playwright of genius turn the tide? Would several literary critics help less than someone with a fine sensibility for the theater itself, for its own

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accoutrements and décor—in other words, another Stark Young? And how much would all this be hardly more than leading a horse to water, so long as the innate lure of the theater itself—so long as what is *theatrically* memorable in an *Awake and Sing,* a *Little Foxes,* a *Streetcar Named Desire,* a *The Visit*—failed to assert its appeal? Two further queries come to mind: first, how far does the right sort of theater foster the right sort of audience, and how far is it the other way round? And second, have I rung an alarm bell when there was no fire—is there actually a much greater highbrow response to the theater in America than I have reason to think?

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John Henry Raleigh

O'NEILL'S LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT AND NEW ENGLAND IRISH-CATHOLICISM

Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* has been rightly praised as his finest play (and tragedy) as well as perhaps the finest play (and tragedy) ever written on this continent. It does not have much competition, to be sure, but whatever competition it may have—*Winterset, Death of a Salesman,* O'Neill's own early tragedies, and the like—is so completely outdistanced that there is no point in making comparisons and contrasts. *Long Day's Journey* stands by itself. All the power in characterization and the compassion for humanity that everyone knew O'Neill always had and which always showed itself, even if fitfully under such lugubrious surfaces as *Lazarus Laughed,* comes out clearly, cleanly, and unambiguously in *Long Day's Journey.* And the considerable talent for humor that manifested itself in *Ah, Wilderness!* is here joined to a somber plot; so that we have the final paradox that this darkest of tragedies is continually breaking out into wild comedy.

O'Neill's severest critics have never denied him, in a word—"Power"; and this is his most "powerful" play. In all his other "powerful" plays, there are always touches or stretches of staginess and awkwardness. But *Long Day's Journey* is clean, almost pure, one might say.

The first question to be asked is where does this clean power come from? It comes, first of all, from the autobiographical sources, as he tells us in the preface, the "old sorrow, written in tears and blood," and the final strength and courage "to face my dead at last and write this play." After biblical and Greek-Civil War descents into past history (*Lazarus Laughed* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*), after travels in the Orient (*Marco Millions*), after primitivism (*The Emperor Jones* and *The Hairy Ape*), after racial imbroglios (*All*

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God's Chillun Got Wings), after nineteenth-century New England (*Desire Under the Elms*), after the sea, after Greek masks, after dynamos, after all kinds of themes and devices and bizarre subjects, he finally returned home to New London, Connecticut, to his family, and to himself. As Stephen Dedalus says in *Ulysses*:

If Socrates leaves his home today he will find the sage seated on his doorsteps. If Judas goes forth tonight it is to Judas his steps will tend. Every life is many days, day after day. We walk through ourselves, meeting robbers, ghosts, giants, old men, young men, wives, widows, brothers-in-love. But always meeting ourselves.

For certainly even a most superficial knowledge of the O'Neill family and of the facts of Eugene O'Neill's early life show that the play is very close to being straight autobiography (no matter what discrepancies may ultimately be pointed out). In another sense it does not matter how close to, or how far from, are the facts of O'Neill's life to the facts of the play, for *Long Day's Journey* is more impressive as a cultural document than it is as an autobiographical document. Furthermore, its distinctive qualities are given, not so much by family, as by culture, or by family-culture, since the two cannot be separated. The culture is, of course, New England Irish Catholicism, and it is this that provides the folkways and mores, the character types, the interrelationships between characters, the whole attitude toward life that informs *Long Day's Journey* and gives it its meaning. As such, *Long Day's Journey* is *the* great cultural expression of American Irish-Catholicism; it puts permanently into the shade all the "stage-Irish-St. Patrick's Day-'Going My Way'-'Mother McCree'" type of sentimentality that has encircled the image of the Irish in America. Just as effectively does it underline the shallowness of the higher-level sentimentality of Edwin O'Connor's *The Last Hurrah,* a whimsical account of the farcical and shoddy character and career of Boston's James Michael Curley. The only other American Irish-Catholic document that even approaches O'Neill's in power and truth is the *Studs Lonigan* trilogy of James T. Farrell, but Farrell's novel is tendentious and therefore "dates," and it lacks both the compassion and the humor of O'Neill's picture. Farrell's novel was written in anger—well justified, it should be added—but O'Neill's play was written out of sorrow, forgiveness, and, strangely enough, a kind

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of joy. Its world therefore exists on a higher level, humanely speaking, than does that of Farrell. In Farrell's novel there are all kinds of things to blame for the vulgarity and pettiness of the characters' lives. In O'Neill there is no pettiness, no real vulgarity, and nothing is to blame except everybody. Social forces, as such, do not exist and, as in Greek tragedy, we are face to face with guilty-innocent humanity on the purely personal level. All the terrible things that members of a family—in this case an Irish family—will do to one another, often in innocence, and always without reference to outside people or events, are presented in a relentless and yet compassionate honesty. (It should be added, although it will not concern me here, that the finest primarily comic expression of the same culture is O'Neill's *Ah, Wilderness!*).

I

When Yeats and Shaw founded the Irish Academy of Letters, they invited O'Neill to become an associate member, which he did, although he was an American by birth. For it would be no exaggeration to say that an American of Irish-Catholic parentage born in New England in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century was really not American but Irish.[1] This distinctive, closely knit culture, which is in our day relaxing, produced a whole gallery of "un-American" types. Here is how O'Neill describes one of them in *A Moon for the Misbegotten*: he is Mike Hogan.

> He has a common Irish face, its expression sullen, or slyly cunning, or primly self-righteous. He never forgets that he is a good Catholic, faithful to all the observances, and so is one of the élite of Almighty God in a world of damned sinners composed of Protestants and bad Catholics. In brief, MIKE is a New England Irish Catholic Puritan, Grade B, and an extremely irritating youth to have around.

But it also produced Eugene O'Neill and the four haunted Tyrones of *Long Day's Journey,* end-products, you might say, of the Irish famine of the late 1840's, which set off the vast migrations to America. James O'Neill himself was born in County Kilkenny in Ireland, in the year 1849 and came to this country at the age of five, bring-

1. Obviously things have changed, as the smiling face of Senator Kennedy on the cover of *Life* or *Time* attests.

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ing with him the penuriousness and the land-hunger that obsess James Tyrone, the father of *Long Day's Journey.* More important, he was a member of a vast group of immigrants who did not so much leave Ireland as bring Ireland to America. In New England, in particular, partly because of their intense clannishness, partly because they were "outsiders," partly because they found themselves "ruled" by a Protestant Anglophile culture—it was Ireland all over again with the hostile "strangers" in control—the Irish remained "Irish" and did not get assimilated for several generations, sometimes for a half century or more; they were not merged in one or two generations, as were other foreign groups, particularly Northern European ones, in other parts of the country. James Tyrone, of course, was born in Ireland and is a professional patriot who thinks that Shakespeare and the Duke of Wellington were dyed-in-the-wool Irish Catholics. But even his two sons, who are in rebellion and who scorn this patriotic nonsense, are still—hopelessly for them—"Irish," their whole characters being dominated by the passionate tribal and familial customs and resultant character typology in which their souls were forged.

How extraordinarily profound and pervasive were these characteristics can be only fully appreciated when one becomes aware of the fact that historical accounts of the Irish national character, even in medieval and antemedieval times, sound remarkably like a description of the Tyrone family. It would be no exaggeration to say that a straight line can be drawn from the primitive forests of antique Ireland to the haunted New London, Connecticut, residence of the Tyrone family in the twentieth century.

In the first place there were no clans in ancient Ireland, with the family being the basic unit although the family was not a one generation affair. According to Sean O'Faolain in his *The Irish—A Character Study,* the basic family unit was symbolized by the hand: "The limits of the sacred nexus were symbolized by the hand. The palm was the common ancestor; the joints of the finger were his descendents into his grand-children; the finger-nails were his great grand-children." These families, moreover, were not inclined toward communal enterprises, such as the founding of cities, and it was the Normans, Danes, and Tudors who first constructed every Irish town of any consequence that exists. To these observations by O'Faolain

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should be added two more by Shane Leslie from his book *The Irish Tangle*. First, there is the immemorial Irish cult of chastity which was, evidently, a pre-Christian phenomenon (although some modern students of Irish culture claim that the ancient "chastity" is really a projection imposed upon the past by modern historians). There was the legend that an Irish girl could travel unmolested throughout the whole of Ireland, carrying a gold ring as a wand; a legendary Irish king was supposed to have drowned nine daughters at Doon in Keery because one had a lover and he could not determine which one it was. Second, and at the opposite moral pole, there is the constant turbulence and recourse to drink. These national habits are best underlined by the anecdote concerning the Cromwellian who bequeathed to an Irish community a supply of dirks and whisky, hoping they would all get drunk and kill one another.

Four more observations should be made. First, as Robin Flower points out in *The Irish Tradition,* medieval Irish love poetry was dominated by two diametrically opposed impulses: delicate sentiment and beauty, on the one hand, and the most astringent kind of irony, on the other. Second—and this scarcely needs documentation —there is the national concern with betrayal, the "Judas-complex" that dominates Irish life and literature. For centuries the "informer" was a constant political fact of the most bitter importance, and in a literary document like *Ulysses* one can see it as a constant leitmotif of Dublin life; as Mr. Deasy says to Stephen: "Helen, the runaway wife of Menelaus, ten years the Greeks made war on Troy. A faithless wife brought the strangers to our shore here . . . a woman too brought Parnell low." Joyce himself was deeply possessed by the national Judas-complex and was always talking of those who "betrayed" him. (He even used the word "crucified" at times.) Third, again requiring no documentation, there is the national commitment to Roman Catholicism, which produced both the most extravagant devotion and the most deeply felt blasphemy, as in *Ulysses,* for example. Fourth and finally, there is the national preoccupation with rhetoric and the national eloquence.

Excessively familial; noncommunal; sexually chaste; turbulent; drunken; alternately and simultaneously sentimental and ironical about love; pathlogically obsessed with betrayal; religious-blasphemous; loquacious: these are some of the historical attributes of the

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Irish character. To these nine characteristics should be added a tenth, which was an emergent, post-famine phenomenon, namely, a tendency toward less and later marriage on the part of the young men and a tendency, therefore, for these young men to remain at home with their father and mother. In short, here is an abstract picture of the Tyrone family, and it is on these generic lines that the characters, and the interrelationships, in *Long Day's Journey* are formed.

There is a further historical complication in the play, which makes the whole situation much more concrete and which cuts across the generic abstractions outlined above, in that *Long Day's Journey into Night* also shows the Irish in the process of assimilation, or, rather—for none of these characters can properly be called assimilated—in the process of breaking away from the culture of the "Old Country." There are at least four levels of this process represented in *Long Day's Journey*. There is first of all—never seen on the stage but talked about by the Tyrones—an authentic, unregenerate Irish peasant-farmer—a tenant of the Tyrones—named Shaughnessy, cunning, crafty, powerful, and possessed of a "terrible tongue." The Tyrones pretend to be shocked but are secretly delighted when they learn that Shaughnessy, just by use of this "terrible tongue," has run a Standard Oil man named Harker off his property although he was quite guilty of what Harker had come to accuse him. This incident, which must have been based on fact, amused O'Neill immensely, and he presented it directly and fully in *A Moon for the Misbegotten,* where he changes "Shaughnessy" to "Hogan" and "Harker" to "Harder." Hogan's verbal assault on Harder is a masterpiece and one of the high points of O'Neill's humor, and Irish mock-eloquence. (What had happened was that Hogan had let his pigs—of course, he keeps pigs—wallow in a pond on Harder's property.) Hogan's peroration is worth quoting; he has accused Harder of giving his pigs pneumonia:

All prize pigs, too! I was offered two hundred dollars apiece for them. Twenty pigs at two hundred, that's four thousand. And a thousand to cure the sick and cover funeral expenses for the dead. Call it four thousand you owe me. (*Furiously*) And you'll pay for it, or I'll sue you, so help me Christ! I'll drag you in every court in the land! I'll paste your ugly mug on the front page of every newspaper as a pig-

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murdering tyrant! Before I'm through with you, you'll think you're the King of England at an Irish wake! (*With a quick change of pace to a wheedling confidential tone.*) Tell me now, if it isn't a secret, whatever made you take such a savage grudge against pigs? Sure, it isn't reasonable for a Standard Oil Man to hate hogs.

There is too on stage in *Long Day's Journey* Cathleen the serving girl, ignorant, cheerful, bumptious.

A cut above Shaughnessy-Hogan and Cathleen is James Tyrone himself, who, according to O'Neill, is in fact still a peasant: nerveless, full of vitality, physically powerful, penurious. Still less of the earth is Mary Tyrone, neurotic, idealistic, dope-addicted, religious; further up still are the nihilistic sons, drunken, cynical, libidinous, spouting *fin de siècle* estheticism and pessimism (Swinburne and Nietzsche are the favorites). Nevertheless, the generic outline still stands, despite this historical progression. One is not Irish, it seems, with impunity and even in rebellion, the norms are still there.

II

I shall proceed through my catalogue of attributes, in reverse order, beginning with the tendency for late marriages and subsequent prolonged adolescence.[2] Jamie, 33, and Edmund, 23, are still, from, say, the contemporary American point of view and practice—which seems to be steadily pushing the normal age for marriage back into late childhood—in adolescence, living at home with the father who grudgingly doles out "allowance" money to them. It is true that Jamie is a wastrel and that Edmund is tuberculous; it is true too that both have left home, at one time or another, but like Willie and Biff Loman, they really *cannot* leave home, and they always return. This feeling goes so deep that it is not even explained or discussed by the play; it is a fact, like the weather, the "given" of a situation.

Loquacity, like drink, is one of the national addictions, and this should not be confused with eloquence, which is the property of the

2. Since writing this, I have read Agnes Boulton's *Part of a Long Story*, and have learned that Edmund (Eugene) had married and divorced before he married her and before the year in which *Long Day's Journey* takes place. As she says: "Who, having seen *Long Day's Journey into Night*, would ever realize that Edmund, the younger son, had been married and divorced and was the father of a child nearly three years old on that August evening in 1912?" (p. 206). But I think my point still stands.

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French. Irish "eloquence" is highly overrated, as any critical examination of Irish literature will show. Wilde once said to Yeats: "We Irish are too poetical to be poets; we are a nation of brilliant failures, but we are the greatest talkers since the Greeks." Wilde's own "elegance," O'Casey's meanderings, Joyce's purple passages ("his soul swooned slowly"), Synge's "keening," Shaw's attempt to be poetical with Marchbanks, George Moore's sentences ("squeezed" out of a tooth paste tube, as Yeats said), O'Neill's attempts at "poetry": all these—Yeats alone excepted—show a singular poverty of genuine and organic eloquence. The real forte of the Irish is just in talking, and talking in a special way, histrionically: striking a comic pose and exaggerating it into a burlesque. The funniest parts of *Ulysses*—"Cyclops" or "Nausicaa"—consist of just this. And O'Neill is only at ease, rhetorically speaking, in similar situations, as, witness, the Hogan episode quoted above, or the performance of Jamie Tyrone which will be quoted below. Loquacity, besides humorous exaggeration, implies repetition. Critics have complained that *Long Day's Journey* is too long; it all could have been said in shorter compass and could have been, therefore, of greater artistic impact. I don't agree with this criticism from an esthetic point of view, and from the point of view I am adopting—the play as cultural artifact—this criticism is completely off the point.[3] For the motto of the Irish, especially the drinking Irish, is that a thing is not said unless it has been repeated almost *ad infinitum*. This verbal repetitiousness, this insistent urge to exaggerate and repeat, colors Irish literature as well. O'Casey's autobiographical volumes are filled with it: "But the O'Briens, the Dillons, and the Healy's, mudmen, madmen, badmen, bedmen, deadmen, spedmen, spudmen, dudmen, . . ."; or, a description of Hell-Fire ". . . in a sea of fire, surgin', singing', scourgin', scorchin', scarifyin', skimmin', waves o'fire . . ." As O'Casey himself says in *Drums Under the Windows*:

> Keltic blood is usually accompanied by excited brains and a reckless temperament, and is always an excuse for exaggeration. When not whining or wheedling, the Kelt is usually in a state of bluff, or funk, and can always wind up to the kind of rhetoric no housemaid can resist.

In the words of the immortal washerwoman in *Finnegan's Wake*: "Wash quit and don't be dabbling. Tuck up your sleeves and loosen

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your talk-tapes." Or in the words of an Irish medieval monk in a verse concerning a cat:

Hunting mice is his delight
Hunting words I sit all night

The dualism of religion-blasphemy likewise runs through the Tyrone family. The father—and this is often true of Irish families—is conventionally pious, without any deep commitment to the Old Faith. He uses his religion in a purely conventional fashion, to blame, for example, the worldly failures of his two sons on the fact that they have both become apostates: "You've both flouted the faith you were born and brought up in—the one true faith of the Catholic Church—and your denial has brought nothing but self-destruction!" The mother, on the other hand, is deeply, neurotically, but still honestly, pious. Like Claudius, she cannot lie to God, He being so real to her. Rather in her case, as might be expected, it is the Virgin Mary who, in effect, usurps the Trinity and becomes "God," for the Virgin is the symbol of female purity and is thus inevitably the patron saint of Irish Roman Catholic convent girls. As such, the Virgin signifies innocence and childhood, the shelter of the convent, the benign smile of the Mother Superior, the loving earthly father at home—in short, the happy times before she married the hard-drinking, rather crude, though kindly, James Tyrone, and had encountered the rude male world of tobacco, alcohol, cronies, and sweat, the agonies of childbirth, the failure of children, the black abyss of dope addiction. Yet she cannot pray, although she would like to, for God or the Virgin sees all:

Longingly.

If I could only find the faith I lost, so I could pray again!

She pauses—then begins to recite the Hail Mary in a flat, empty tone.

"Hail, Mary, full of grace! The Lord is with Thee; blessed art Thou among women."

Sneeringly.

You expect the Blessed Virgin to be fooled by a lying dope fiend reciting words! You can't hide from her!

The morphine is a road back to that virginal childhood and her "Long Day's Journey into Night" is a psychological regress to her convent days.

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The sons are militantly atheistical. Edmund's favorite author is Nietzsche, whom he quotes: " 'God is dead: of His pity for man hath God died.' " The blasphemous reaction is not emphasized in *Long Day's Journey,* but it is in *Moon for the Misbegotten* where Jamie Tyrone, now in his early forties, plays a leading role. Here he tells of his blasphemous conduct after his mother's death. He had been abstemious for two years, but on the news of his mother's death an intolerable desire for desecration overcame him. He gets drunk, almost breaks out into a diatribe at the wake, and when escorting the coffin, in the baggage car of the train, to the East from Los Angeles, he continues his drinking and has a nightly assignation with a fat, blonde, fifty-dollar whore. In his drunken revels with the blonde he sings the last two lines of a "tear-jerker" song that he knew as a child:

And the baby's cries can't waken her
In the baggage car ahead.

The idea of betrayal, the "turncoat" psychology, permeates all the Tyrones. Everybody has betrayed everybody else. The father betrayed the mother because of his stinginess: when she was in pain once, he hired a cheap doctor, who unscrupulously started her on morphine; and the father will also probably betray Edmund by sending him to a cheap sanatorium. The mother betrayed Edmund just by bearing him, by bringing him into his painful existence. Jamie, in effect, had killed the son Eugene, who died in infancy, after having been visited by the contagious Jamie (who had been told to stay away). Edmund and Jamie fail their parents by their wasted lives, and Jamie betrays Edmund by trying to corrupt him. (They all are always honest enough to admit all these enormities.) The mother betrays them all by beginning to take dope on the day of the "long journey." Culturally, psychologically, they "know" that nobody is to be depended upon, father, mother, sibling. Whatever the weakness is, it will be given in to. The dope addict mother can't be cured —they all know this, and expect it. In fact, they would be disappointed in a deep, obscure sense if she broke off, and they were all to be happy and secure. They don't expect to be happy, for life is not like that. Always there is the fierce, primitive suspicion that no one is to be trusted. The promises to the parents and the relatives, the "pledge" to the priest, the "bargain" with God, about "the

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drink" (or dope)—all these go out the window, in a moment, when the implacable imagination, the seizure of the nerves, the impossible desire for a nirvana that lies at the bottom of a bottle of whiskey, comes over the Irishman. Then there is the constant chorus: "You drink!" "You failed!" "You'd like to see me dead!" "You take dope!" "Where's the hophead?" says Jamie of his mother.

The combination of sentiment and irony in matters of love is likewise a Tyrone characteristic, and most cogently illustrated by the mother in her relationship to her "loved ones." For she does love them all, deeply, and is quite sentimental about them. In her most sentimental moments she is capable of misty-eyed dreams of the future happiness of the family. Edmund, the gifted son, is an especial love. Yet she is capable of the most searing and corrosive statements to all of them. To Edmund, her beloved, she can say:

> *Turns on Edmund with a hard, accusing antagonism—almost a revengeful enmity.*
>
> *I never knew what rheumatism was before you were born! Ask your father!*

Throughout the play we find her alternately sentimental and corrosive. As Edmund says of her:

> Deliberately, that's the hell of it! You know something in her does it deliberately—to get beyond our reach, to be rid of us, to forget we're alive! It's as if, in spite of loving us, she hated us.

Love for all of the Tyrones is ambiguous, unresolved tension between tenderness and hate, sentimentality and irony.

It is impossible to estimate accurately the cosmic import of the "bottle" in the lives of the Tyrones (the only reason that the mother does not take to it is because she possesses something stronger). In a way the Irish addiction to drink is a simplifying element in their lives, for this is how all problems are met—to reach for the bottle. When the mother takes to dope on the morning of the "long day," she knows, as a matter of course, that her men will all be drunk by nightfall. "The Bottle" is at the center of the room, and in many ways is the most important object in the room. If not using it, they talk about it. It enters into their very characters; the father's penuriousness is most neatly summed up by the fact that he keeps his liquor under lock and key and has an eagle eye for the exact

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level of the whiskey in the bottle he has grudgingly set forth. By the same token, the measure of the sons' rebellion is how much liquor they can "sneak." It is doubtful if the phrase and the action of "sneaking a drink" have in any other cultural group the immense significance that they have with the Irish. Allied to this peculiarly Irish custom are the concomitant phrase and action: "watering the whiskey," that is, filling the bottle with water to the level where it was before you "sneaked your drink." (The pathology of this custom is very curious, for obviously you fool nobody since the next person who uses the bottle instantly knows it has been "watered." And it doesn't take much imagination—since you know the habits of your family—to guess who has been doing the "watering." Thus James Tyrone knows that Jamie "waters" his whiskey, and Jamie knows that his father knows. Yet he will continue to do so: a rite that signifies a fictitious secrecy.) In some Irish households whole quarts of whiskey, indeed whole cases of whiskey, would slowly evolve into a watery, brown liquid, without the bottles having ever been set forth socially, so to speak. This act—the lonely, surreptitious, rapid gulp of whisky—is the national rite, and probably deserves a sculptural embodiment, like Rodin's "The Thinker."

The "turbulence" of the Tyrone family hardly needs to be remarked upon. The play is, in part, psychologically speaking, a "free-for-all," with everybody's hand against everybody else. Yet it is not this simple, for their love for one another is equally overpowering. No relationship has any stability and, sometimes, second by second, it alternates between love and hate. Here, for example, is an interchange between James Tyrone and Edmund (they are both drunk, of course); the father speaks first:

You'll obey me and put out that light or, big as you are, I'll give you a thrashing that'll teach you—!

Suddenly he remembers Edmund's illness and instantly becomes guilty and shamefaced.

Forgive me, lad. I forgot— You shouldn't goad me into losing my temper.

EDMUND

Ashamed himself now.

Forget it, Papa. I apologize, too. I had no right being nasty about

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nothing. I am a bit soused, I guess. I'll put out the damned light.

He starts to get up.

TYRONE

No, stay where you are. Let it burn.

He stands up abruptly—and a bit drunkenly—and begins turning on the three bulbs in the chandelier, with a childish, bitterly dramatic self-pity.

We'll have them all on! Let them burn! To hell with them! The poorhouse is the end of the road, and it might as well be sooner as later!

He finishes turning on the lights.

EDMUND

Has watched this proceeding with an awakened sense of humor—now he grins, teasing affectionately.

That's a grand curtain.

He laughs.

You're a wonder, Papa. ?

TYRONE

Sits down sheepishly—grumbles pathetically.

That's right, laugh at the old fool! The poor old ham! But the final curtain will be in the poorhouse just the same, and that's not comedy!

Then as Edmund is still grinning, he changes the subject.

For the Irish are just what the popular legend about them says: mercurial. As another American Irishman, F. Scott Fitzgerald, once said of himself: "I was always saving or being saved—in a single morning I would go through the emotions ascribed to Wellington at Waterloo. I lived in a world of inscrutable hostiles and inalienable friends and supporters."

The sexual chastity of the Irish is likewise a motivating force in the play. In the mother's preoccupation with the Virgin we can see its feminine manifestation. For while it is never said in so many words, we can see that one of the mother's basic difficulties lies in that initial rude shock of the male assault and that the morphine addiction is an effect, not a cause. For the dope is her way back to her virginal childhood. Tyrone himself explains that she was not quite the nun-like, little girl that she now pictures herself. On the contrary, she was attractive, flirtatious, almost hoydenish, and she fell immediately and irrevocably in love with the handsome and charming young actor that was James Tyrone. Yet the hard facts of the marriage were too much for her, too little prepared for by the sweet,

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misty existence of the convent. It is after marriage that she learns that Tyrone had had a mistress, that he drinks, that he will go out with cronies and get drunk, while she remains alone in a "cheap" (as she keeps repeating) hotel room. Always in her mind is the terrible discrepancy between her life as a girl, or her metaphor for it, and her life as an adult married woman.

The sons, especially Jamie, represent the obverse side of the sexual chastity of the Irish. For while they are anything but chaste, they yet cannot partake of normal sexual relations and connect sex with love. For them it must always be a desecration, consecrated by drink and debauchery. The mother laments the fact that they never have anything to do with "nice" girls. Precisely, because they in their way are devotees of the Virgin too. Yeats said of Dowson: "Sober, he looked on no woman; drunk, he picked the cheapest whore. 'He did not even want them clean,' said a friend. 'I have been faithful to thee, Cynara, in my fashion.'" Jamie Tyrone will have only whores, and only fat ones, and to them he recites, of course, Dowson. As Edmund describes it:

It's a good likeness of Jamie, don't you think, hunted by himself and whiskey, hiding in a Broadway hotel room with some fat tart—he likes them fat—reciting Dowson's "Cynara" to her.

He recites derisively, but with deep feeling.

"All night upon mine heart I felt her warm heart beat,
Night-long within mine arms in love and sleep she lay;
Surely the kisses of her bought red mouth were sweet;
But I was desolate and sick of an old passion,
When I awoke and found the dawn was gray:
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion."

Jeeringly.

And the poor fat burlesque queen doesn't get a word of it, but suspects she's being insulted!

Fat, blonde, whores: that is the reaction of some Irish males to the sexual prohibitions that his culture imposes on him. This is the Saturday night dream of young Studs Lonigan: going to bed with a buxom blonde. For it is generally buxom women, with marmoreal thighs and full breasts, as if size alone could make up for the imposed frustrations and inhibitions. Abbie in *Desire Under the Elms* is "buxom, full of vitality. Her round face is pretty but marred by

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its rather gross sensuality." Nina in *Strange Interlude* is "tall with broad square shoulders, slim strong hips and long beautifully developed legs— . . ." But the O'Neill-Irish sexual fantasy receives its proper apotheosis in *Moon for the Misbegotten* in Josie Hogan who is

> five feet eleven in her stockings and weighs around one hundred and eighty. Her sloping shoulders are broad, her chest deep with large, firm breasts, her waist wide but slender by contrast with her hips and thighs. She has long smooth arms, immensely strong, although no muscles show. The same is true of her legs. . . . She is all woman.

Jamie himself says: " 'I like them tall and strong and voluptuous, now, with beautiful big breasts.' " And looking at Josie, this monument of female flesh (which is available to him, if he so desires, but which he has classified as "nice girl"), he murmurs—he is drunk—"You have a beautiful strong body, too, Josie—and beautiful eyes and hair, and a beautiful smile and beautiful warm breasts." It would seem that only a gigantic female breast, cosmic in scope, can make up to the Irish male for his frustrations. And, characteristically, Jamie Tyrone spends the last hours of his fictional existence (the last scene in *A Moon for the Misbegotten*) with his head resting on the bosom of Josie Hogan. Characteristically too, since he has (wrongly) classified her as a "nice girl," like his mother, a devotee of the Virgin, so to speak, he keeps the relationship scrupulously filial. So too when Joyce came to create his woman of the earth, Molly Bloom, she must be monumental in proportions. The first glimpse that we have of her is through the voyeuristic eyes of Mr. Bloom, at eight o'clock in the morning in the bedroom at 7 Eccles Street (this is the first description in the book of Molly): "He looked calmly down on her bulk and between her large soft bubs, sloping within her nightdress like a she goat's udder."

A secondary creation of the male rebellion against the Puritan aspects of his culture is the "ne'er-do-well." Any large Irish family used to produce at least one of these. (He's usually your "uncle.") He tends to be, of course, unmarried; he is usually good-looking; he has more than his share of the Irish charm; he has a fine sense of humor; and everybody likes him. He is also completely irresponsible, can never hold a job; and devotes himself to liquor and women, al-

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though the liquor is usually more important to him. In short, he is Jamie Tyrone. Very often—since he represents in the Irish national drama the Prince of Darkness—he is positively "Mephistophelean," which is the word used to describe Jamie Tyrone. Lest we think this is an artistic stroke of O'Neill's imagination, we may remember that, according to Frank Budgen, Joyce, who was in his own inimitable way an Irish "ne'er-do-well," was called by the chorus girls in the Stadt theater in Zurich "Herr Satan" and that Budgen's landlady was actually afraid of this satanic gentleman, with his long thin face, thick glasses, high forehead, and jaunty demeanor.

The Tyrones, like their ancient ancestors, are, to a man, non-communal. Save for the reference to the Standard Oil Company and a trip to the drugstore, modern American society does not exist for them and certainly it plays no role in the play. But it is not only a question of society; other people have no existence for the Tyrones. The father, it is true, has his drunken cronies, but the family has no social life at all, and the two sons and the mother are lone wolves. The mother in particular feels and laments their isolation and loneliness:

> If there was only some place I could go to get away for a day, or even an afternoon, some woman friend I could talk to—not about anything serious, simply laugh and gossip and forget for a while—someone besides the servants—that stupid Cathleen!

Now it is true too that the Irish are indefatigably gregarious—witness the people in *Ulysses*. Yet they are capable, especially in an alien environment, of great isolation and loneliness, as *Long Day's Journey* evidences.

For they are most profoundly and primarily committed—to get to my last point—to the family. Everything pales beside the fact of the *family,* which is the macro-microcosm that blots out the universe and takes the place of Hardy's Cosmic Forces, or Marx's march of history, or Shaw's evolutionary powers, or Sinclair Lewis's middle class, or Arthur Miller's "changing America." They are always swarming all over one another, simultaneously loving and torturing each other. They can't leave one another alone, either in love or hate, yet each assault—"you wish I were dead!" is punctuated by an unabashed sentiment and humorous affection.

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It should be said too that the family swarm produced a violently negative reaction as well (not dealt with by O'Neill in *Long Day's Journey*), just as the religious intensity generated the blasphemy. As in the case of the blasphemous reaction, it was the male who rebelled against the dominion of petticoats and the responsibilities of fatherhood that home and offspring imposed. Some of the violence of this reaction can be gauged from a fact of history, rather than poetry, namely, Stanislaus Joyce's account in *My Brother's Keeper* of his own father's successful flight to freedom and ultimate irresponsibility. When Mrs. Joyce lay dying of cancer, John Joyce blurted at her: "I'm finished. I can't do any more. If you can't get well, die. Die and be damned to you!" And within two years after the mother's death, the family was scattered. "I'll get rid of you all," he would say, "and go back to Cork. But I will break your hearts before I go. Oh yes, by God! See if I don't. I'll break your hearts, but I'll break your stomachs first." He succeeded in divesting himself of his "fleas," as he called them in more jocular moments, and had for himself twenty-six or twenty-seven years of freedom before he died and during which time he frequently complained about his being deserted by his unnatural family. For the pressures of the Irish family seem to lead either to total intimacy or to total estrangement.

The peculiarly intimate relationships of the Irish family were given, I think, by two conditions. First of all, it is a democracy in a wild sort of way. These are not parents and children, each with their appropriate range of personality and behavior. They are all *equal,* and can condemn one another openly, irrespective of age or rank. The children are not children but little adults. The adults are not adults but big children. The second factor is that they have no *prohibitory conventions*: that is, there are no agreed-upon prohibitions, either in the realm of action or the realm of subject matter. There are no certain things that everybody mutually agrees to keep silent about; there is no norm of conduct beyond which one does not venture. Above all, there is no reticence. Everybody says just what he or she thinks; so that one enormity after another is uttered. Yet so deeply are they involved with and committed to one another that these enormities in reality mean nothing. They pass like the air that gave them voice. For while the Irish may know that life is

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a tragedy—"We begin to live," said Yeats, "when we have conceived life as a tragedy"—they have a deep suspicion that it may well be—for all they know—a farcical comedy. And against Yeats's observation we must place the perhaps better known one of George Bernard Shaw:

> An Irishman's imagination never lets him alone, never convinces him, never satisfies him; but it makes him that he can't face reality nor deal with it nor handle it nor conquer it: he can only sneer at those that do . . . and imagination's such a torture that you can't bear it without whiskey. . . . And all the while there goes on a horrible, senseless, mischievous laughter.

These two observations, of Yeats and of Shaw, define precisely the unique quality of the atmosphere in which the Tyrones live, and O'Neill himself puts both observations in the mouths of the two characters in the play, the mother and Edmund, who are the most perceptive and intelligent of the Tyrones. A pessimistic version of Yeats's observation is put, most appropriately, by the mother:

> None of us can help the things life has done to us. They're done before you realize it, and once they're done they make you do other things until at last everything comes between you and what you'd like to be, and you've lost your true self forever.

But Edmund, in the middle of a serious conversation with his father, makes Shaw's point. The father has just turned out a light bulb, and Edmund suddenly realizes the humor of the father's stinginess, which has also caused tragedy:

> *Edmund suddenly cannot hold back a burst of strained, ironical laughter. Tyrone is hurt.*
>
> What the devil are you laughing at?
>
> EDMUND
>
> Not at you, Papa. At life. It's so damned crazy.

And his own bit of philosophy, which verges upon the old-style O'Neillian bathos and pseudo-poetry—"I dissolved in the sea, became white sails and flying spray, became beauty and rhythm . . ." —is saved by irony and humor:

> *He grins wryly.*

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It was a great mistake, my being born a man, I would have been much more successful as a sea gull or a fish.

And later on he says of himself: "Stammering is the native eloquence of us fog people."

Constantly—except for the mother—they see the wild humor of the tragic or grotesque things that they do. Thus Jamie on the night of the "long day's journey" behaves characteristically; he gets drunk and goes to Mamie Burns's whorehouse, where he picks "Fat Violet," whom Mamie has threatened to fire because she is bad for business; Jamie takes her upstairs and starts reciting "Cynara."

She stood it for a while. Then she got good and sore. Got the idea I took her upstairs for a joke. Gave me a grand bawling out. Said she was better than a drunken bum who recited poetry. Then she began to cry. So I had to say I loved her because she was fat, and she wanted to believe that, and I stayed with her to prove it, and that cheered her up, and she kissed me when I left, and said she'd fallen hard for me, and we both cried a little more in the hallway, and everything was fine, except Mamie Burns thought I'd gone bughouse.

Jamie continues:

This night has opened my eyes to a great career in store for me, my boy! I shall give the art of acting back to the performing seals, which are its most perfect expression. By applying my natural God-given talents in their proper sphere, I shall attain the pinnacle of success! I'll be the lover of the fat woman in Barnum and Bailey's circus!

For they are all animated by a tremendous zest for this life that is so terrible for them, whiskey and all. What they fear is madness and death, and what they fear most of all is suicide (both Edmund and the mother had once made attempts). Drink then is a form of suicide, a day-by-day one, a suicide from which one can awake in the morning. Like gambling, it is suicide without death: and it drowns out that senseless, mischievous laughter always going on high in the background.

III

The peoples of "the Celtic Fringe," with the Atlantic at their backs and a host of formidable aggressors ever bearing down upon them from the Continent, were naturally inspired to seek imaginative relief from

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the pressure of an adverse human environment by dreaming of an Elysium hidden in the bosom of the Ocean . . .

Thus Toynbee in *A Study of History* on the Celts: the perpetual imaginative escape from the intolerable situation. And it is obvious that most of the characteristics that I, and others, have ascribed to the Irish are the result of a passionate people being imprisoned by an endless stasis: historical, political, religious, cultural, sexual, and personal, with the resulting ambiguity of a people and a culture that is at one and the same time violently rebellious and anarchic and inhumanly passive and acquiescent, given, culturally, to musing over past glories in a dull and tedious present, as in the "Cyclops" episode of *Ulysses,* or given, personally, to mulling over the personal past, its motivations, its mistakes, its total determinism over the present, as do characters of *Long Day's Journey.* This peculiarly retrospective mood under which the past is both a lost and glorious paradise and an unyielding tyrant who has fixed his inflexible and murderous hold upon the present (the mood of Mary Tyrone, in short) can be described in two ways: either it can be called an absence of the sense of time (time means nothing to the Tyrones), or an overly acute sense of the past, which makes *it* the living and the present. Both methods of description have been employed, appropriately enough, by Sean O'Faolain in his two books on Irish character and culture. The lack of a time sense is precisely the feeling that O'Faolain in *The Irish—A Character Study* attributes to the ancient Celt's idea of Paradise: "His [the Celt's] idea of Heaven is free of Time but it is rooted in place." But a stranger entering modern Dublin may think of this sense, as O'Faolain describes it in *The Story of Ireland,* as that of living in the past:

> He [the traveler] soon realizes that there are two clocks in Dublin. Some might say—of this world and the next; it is going far enough to say—of today and a very far-off yesterday. He will soon come up against an attitude to life that he will call either traditional or antiquated; venerable or primitive, according to his philosophy.

History, collective and individual, is a "nightmare," in Joyce's words, from which nobody can awake.

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Robert Brustein

NOTES ON A SUBURBAN THEATER

New Audiences For Old

American drama, whose very survival is now contingent on audience approval, has always been conditioned to a large degree by the character and opinions of the American spectator. Eager to adjust its conventions quickly to conform with prevailing tastes, Broadway has unwittingly functioned as a mirror of those tastes, a reflection of the spectator's changing life style. Some of the innovations of post-war American drama can be analyzed and explained if we recognize that in the last fifteen years the American theater audience has been undergoing a crucial mutation. Once drawn from several classes and education levels, theatergoers now come primarily from college-educated upper-income groups; once predominantly city residents, they are now being recruited from wealthy areas both in New York and its suburban surroundings.

The economic reasons for this are fairly well known: rising costs and union feather-bedding have made the mounting of a play an almost prohibitive affair. Yet, rather than trying to control costs by cutting away excessive expenses and superfluous ornamentation, many producers are inflating the budget even further. A dripping sumptuousness characterizes most modern productions—the simple box set is being overshadowed by the multiple setting with lavish appointments; and, while a play could once succeed with one or two reputable stars, now not only the actors but the directors and scene designers must be powerful names, commanding, in addition to large salaries, a substantial cut of the gross. These expenses are passed on to the spectator who pays, as a result, as much as ten dollars for an orchestra seat to the box office, twenty and thirty dollars to theater parties, and sometimes even a hundred dollars to the

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scalpers. Times Square is no place for anyone who is not well-heeled. Rather than compete with television and the movies for the spectator of modest means, Broadway has apparently chosen to survive the financial revolutions of the last fifteen years by becoming a luxury institution.

To judge by the statistics (as box office prices continue to climb, Broadway attendance this year is up almost a million), a substantial luxury audience exists which is growing all the time. But this audience attends the theater out of somewhat different needs than in the past. Wealth and leisure have always been accompanied by intensive cultural interests; today, as prosperity spreads from the few to the many, these genuine interests are subordinated to motives of social aspiration. The recent intensification of the hit-flop mystique indicates that a degree of anxiety and duress now accompanies theatergoing. If plays were once enjoyed primarily for their intrinsic value as escape or entertainment, they are more important today for their external resonances, either providing the spectator with essential cocktail party chit-chat and a sense of self-improvement, or bestowing on him some of the prestige afforded, say, by a subscription to *Horizon*. When one considers the meager enjoyment to be obtained from most Broadway hits (movies are cheaper, more convenient, more consistently entertaining), only something as powerful as social pressure can explain the spectator's eagerness to endure backache, boredom, and baby-sitters for the uncertain delights of a few hours in Times Square. In such an atmosphere, the reviewer's admonitory phrase, "Not To Be Missed!" takes on more sinister connotations. To miss the current hit is to risk contracting a serious case of social B.O.

Under these conditions, Broadway has found it necessary to lure its patrons mainly from the various strongholds of conspicuous consumption—and this naturally means a sustained assault on Suburbia, where so much of the city's wealth and power is being deployed.*

* Aware that early suburban apathy towards the theater stemmed partly from the various discomforts it imposed, canny producers have been adjusting certain Broadway traditions to make theater attendance more convenient. Matinee curtain times have been moved up to 2 P.M.; a 7:30 evening curtain will soon be introduced; theater ticket booths have been placed in Grand Central Terminal and Pennsylvania Station; show trains speed the spectator non-stop from his home to the theater and back; and suburban shopping centers even offer theater tickets as a premium for green stamps. Broadway apparently is willing to do anything—short of setting up branches in the suburbs like the large department stores—to tap that large audience which hovers on the borders of the city.

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But Suburbia today is less a geographical location than a state of mind—in the fatuous 'fifties, spectators from Sutton Place as well as Scarsdale share much the same suburban aspirations and pretensions.

The suburban couple is entirely different from such theatergoers of the 'thirties and 'forties as the tired businessman, the conventioner, the Junior League matinee lady, the political radical, and the intellectual. They are the tired businessman's son and daughter-in-law, on a quest less for wealth than status—better educated, more leisured, more familiar with luxury and comfort. When they moved from their parents' modest apartment to an expensively decorated ranch or town house, the change in neighborhood signified a shift in their style of life which was accompanied by a desire for cultural uplift. Exchanging the old cabinet radio for a stereo hi-fi system, the vulgar still life for a Picasso print, and the set of Compton's for a subscription to a fashionable book club, they proceeded to leave behind—along with rusty skates, broken dolls, and mildewed mahjong pieces—the family's traditional Philistine attitude toward the theater. Hungry for vicarious experience, a-political, brain-washed by socio-psychological concepts, well read in theoretical books, well travelled, cheerily optimistic though slightly desperate, more sexually experimental, somewhat bored and emotionally exhausted, they are now on a compulsive quest for cultural adventures, guided on their tour of Broadway by Brooks Atkinson and Walter Kerr. Reversing their father's old bromide, they might say, with considerably less pride, that they know something about the drama, but they are not too certain what they like.

A New Broadway

In consequence, the atmosphere of Broadway is undergoing a sea change. The theatrical occasion, once somewhat rowdy and relaxed, has now become rather solemn and portentous. One by one, the old theaters are overhauling their tarnished vaudeville trappings and reconverting to more gleaming and opulent appointments. As the limousines out front grow longer and blacker, every evening begins to take on some of the frenetic activity and ostentatious display of opening night. To judge by the conversation of the hordes who mingle under heated marquees to exchange greetings, if Broadway once had to share its audience with the movie houses around the corner, it is more likely to share it today with the Met, the Philhar-

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monic, and the City Center. Attendance at a show is becoming less a casual observance than an act of ritual intensity.

Broadway is, therefore, more disposed to wrap its products in the finery of high artistic achievement than in the plain trappings of mass entertainment; like most luxuries in an age of plenty, the theater has begun to assume an air of importance beyond its actual significance. Things are in a state of transition. The tired businessman, who fills the ranks of the theater parties, must still be accommodated, but the American theater, in general, is presently enjoying its highest level of sophistication. English and French importations, in particular, are developing a substantial audience, and even classical plays are sometimes attended provided they are performed by famous foreign repertories like the Old Vic or the TNP. The Lunts appear not in an insignificant work by Rattigan or Behrman but in Friedrich Duerrenmatt's *The Visit* (appropriately softened for easy consumption), and Helen Hayes consents to play a relatively minor role in *Touch of the Poet* because it was written by Eugene O'Neill. Meanwhile, Elmer Rice tries his hand at a modern adaptation of *Hamlet,* and Archibald MacLeish's *J.B.*—with verse dialogue and biblical references—is the hit of the season.

Sophistication and glamor, however, rather than artistry or vision, have become the new standards of excellence—the glitter of the surface determines success. The suburban spectator is willing to tolerate an enormous amount of formal experimentation, providing this reveals nothing striking or true. Like modern interior decorators, scene designers are taking advantage of this hospitality to the new which accompanies prosperity, indulging theatrical impulses which have hitherto been repressed. The recent rash of Oriental plays, for example, permits artists like Jo Mielzener (*Suzie Wong*) and Oliver Messel (*Rashomon*) to experiment with the revolving stage and the electronic switchboard, dropping tons of water on the stage during rainy sequences when all other effects fail. Since the new sophistication prophesies the death of household realism, not only the designers but the playwrights and directors are preparing for an early wake. While Kazan and Williams, in particular, are expressing themselves through non-realistic techniques, lesser talents are following them close behind. Direct audience address has become a commonplace, even of the most commonplace plays, and it is no longer startling to find characters planted in the orchestra, or walking through scrim

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walls, generally in preparation for a flashback. The new techniques —called "poetic realism"—are mostly borrowed from the Federal Theatre, for, like the experiments of the 'thirties, they are designed to involve the spectator more directly in the events on the stage.

But if the theater of the 'thirties engaged the spectator in order to arouse him, the theater of the 'fifties labors to calm his anxieties and flatter his foibles. Broadway now caters to an audience very much like the audience of eighteenth-century sentimental drama in that it prefers to see a sympathetic reflection of its own life or ideas. Despite its forms, therefore, the substance of American drama still adheres to a narrow realism: the audience is hypnotized into complacency by dramatic representations of "real human situations," and even Job and Hamlet are whittled down to suburban dimensions. In the 'fifties, the spectator himself is the hero of the drama; by the introduction of new dramatic forms, Broadway permits him to applaud his own experience at the end of the play.

The Westport Comedy

In comedy, this has resulted in a new comic form and a new comic hero. Low-brow zany farces of the type fashioned in the past by Kaufman and Hart, George Kelly, George Abbott, and Morris Ryskind, are now considered a form of entertainment too fleeting and unreal to attract a backer's money or a spectator's attention; at the same time, the satire—never too successful on Broadway—has disappeared altogether. The transitional form was the situation comedy of the 'forties (*Dear Ruth, Junior Miss, Kiss and Tell*), usually written by Norman Krasna or F. Hugh Herbert, and often hinging on wholesome juveniles caught in an apparently compromising position ("Gee, Ma, we was only holdin' hands!"). In the 'fifties, however, asexual innocence has developed into sophisticated worldliness, and the result is the Westport comedy, a saga of the cultivated, leisured upper classes.

The Westport comedy—which includes such frothy roundelays as *Tunnel of Love, The Tender Trap, The-Marriage-Go-Round,* and *The Seven Year Itch*—has a tradition which can be traced back to the trifles of Noel Coward and John Van Druten, but it is more immediately influenced by upper-middlebrow reading matter like *New Yorker* fiction. Its dialogue appropriately laconic and suggestive, this form is invariably plotted around the suburbs' favorite indoor sport

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(marital infidelity), while its situations blend domestic jokes with erotic fantasies. In *The-Marriage-Go-Round,* which is typical, the hero, a college professor, is persuaded to commit adultery by a Swedish Amazon who, apparently having read Isadora Duncan's letters to Bernard Shaw, wants to create a perfectly endowed child; when the professor's wife threatens to revenge herself in kind with his best friend, he gets the Amazon to leave the house, and the husband and wife are reconciled. Meanwhile, the soufflé is given the illusion of significance by theatrical devices: the play features a revolving stage, where the dramatic action takes place, and two podiums on either side of the set, from which the hero and heroine lecture the giggling audience on the sexual eccentricities of the opposite sex. Clearly, the Westport comedy is written for an age which finds adultery a source of indulgent laughter rather than pious horror, and it owes its success to a jocular familiarity with the spectator's more permissive attitude towards marriage.

As a result, the suburban spectator finds a blood brother in the hero of the Westport comedy. The baggy-pants comedians of the farces have either died, or retired, or turned to non-comic pursuits. Bert Lahr may still clown occasionally (in plays like *Waiting For Godot*), but the old anarchist Groucho Marx has washed off his eyebrows, grown a dapper moustache, and become a bourgeois quizmaster on TV. The exaggerated features, grotesque makeup, and outlandish costume of the stage zany allowed him to indulge his uninhibited eccentricity; and a comic like W.C. Fields, by alienating the spectator, was often able to attack his traditions and conventions. The domesticated comic hero of the 'fifties, on the other hand, strives for audience identification. Whether endowed with glamorous earnestness, like Charles Boyer and Joseph Cotten, or confused "normality" like Tom Ewell, Tom Poston, and Orson Bean, the Westport hero now doubles as an organization man, impersonating Junior Executives in crew cuts and Ivy League suits. The domestic background of Teddy Hart and Jimmy Savo was once a matter of indifference; but David Wayne is invariably a family man, worrying—like the audience—about his wife, his kids, his income, and the payments on the car. Several cuts above the old comedy in sophistication, the Westport comedy, nevertheless, signifies the death of laughter, for comedy cannot survive such reciprocation between the audience and the stage.

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The Upper Middle Musical Play

In the musical forms, the suburban transformations are just as evident, though still more in process. The gags-and-girls extravaganza, which featured popular songs, nude groupings, and (like the farce to which it is so similar) burlesque skits, has vanished altogether, while the satirical revue (the musical parallel to the satirical comedy) has been exiled to nightclubs and off-Broadway. Impatient with "vulgarity" and "college humor"—the favorite dismissive epithets for these highly entertaining forms—the audience now flocks to the quasi-serious musical play, introduced in the 'forties with *Lady in the Dark* and *Oklahoma.*

Dominated in its early years, and even now to a lesser degree, by Rodgers and Hammerstein, the musical play was traditionally a romance enacted in an exotic setting (Polynesia, the Wild West, Siam), and filled with cheery songs, wholesome dances, and occasional tributes to The American Way of Life, while its major contribution was an added emphasis on plot and theme, achieved through the adaptation of light works. Many of the musicals being produced today, however, are a good deal more serious than the light-hearted creations of Rodgers and Hammerstein. The romantic plot of *South Pacific* might have included, buried somewhere beneath its manifold love songs and production numbers, a timid and irrelevant plea for racial tolerance. Now, as the musical slowly converts from an exotic romance to a problem play in contemporary dress, the entire work is loaded with "sincerity" and "significance." Social phenomena like juvenile delinquency (*West Side Story*), prostitution (*New Girl in Town*), extra-marital adventure (*Most Happy Fella*), and the parental selfishness of stage mothers (*Gypsy*) are the new themes of a form which labors to edify as well as to entertain.

The new musicals, in other words, are being constructed around somewhat sturdier scaffoldings. Richard Rodgers still writes tuneful, sentimental songs, but Leonard Bernstein and Frank Loesser are working with symphonic and operatic modes; Agnes De Mille's dancers are still kicking their heels over their heads, but the new choreographer-directors (Jerome Robbins, Michael Kidd, Bob Fosse) are introducing longer, more esoteric ballets, which often carry much of the plot; Mary Martin and Ethel Merman still draw large audiences, but now they are required to emote as well as sing, while

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serious actors like Rex Harrison, Shirley Booth, and Robert Preston talk their way through the songs, reserving their talents for the dramatic sections; and while Oscar Hammerstein may still loot second-rate literature for his source material, more serious-minded adapters like Arthur Laurents and Lillian Hellman are turning to classics by Shakespeare, Voltaire, Jane Austen, Shaw, Synge, O'Casey, and O'Neill.

The growing sophistication of the musical is further reflected in heroes and heroines who have developed a series of complex qualities. The characters of Rodgers and Hammerstein were usually modelled after an urban ideal of rural simplicity; whether cowboys, Waves, or South Sea Islanders, they all shared an innocence and optimism about life which they took every occasion to affirm. In the 'forties, the audience identified with a heroine who could boast she was "just as corny as Kansas in August"; in the 'fifties, the hero who claims to be "just an ordinary man" is a highly educated, highly ironic Professor of Phonetics. The musical stage, once devoted to wholesome creatures who rubbed soap in their hair to signify the soapy cleanliness of their souls, today more frequently features whores, junkies, neurotic mothers, burlesque queens, and crap-shooters, most of them covered with spiritual, if not physical, grime. Rather than insist, like Nellie Forbisher, that they are as "normal as blueberry pie," the delinquents of *West Side Story* announce that they are "sick, sick, sick," and even provide an amusingly exaggerated inventory of their family perversions to prove the disease is catching:

> *My father is a bastard, my ma's an SOB;*
> *My grandpa's always plastered, my grandma pushes tea;*
> *My sister wears a moustache, my brother wears a dress—*
> *Goodness Gracious, that's why I'm a mess!*

Of course, most of these characters still try to be ingratiating—to my knowledge, a truly unpleasant musical hero has not appeared since *Pal Joey*—but they certainly show an increased spectator tolerance about what constitutes amiability.

In short, one must grant that the new form is a decided advance over the square creations of the 'forties; but it is not yet, as Walter Kerr suggests, America's answer to Elizabethan drama. The musical may show real artistry in its music and dance, but the watered text

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has about half the entertainment value of a caper by Bobby Clark. As for art, following its source part way, it may be tempted into troublesome areas, but it doesn't stray far before returning to its traditional home base, the love story (even *My Fair Lady* was marred by its compromise ending). Similarly, it may flirt with unconventional ideas but these are invariably resolved in a conventional fashion: Stephen Sondheim's lyrics, in *West Side Story,* occasionally satirize the social worker's view of juvenile delinquency, but Arthur Laurents's book is, nevertheless, founded on just such glib, mechanical rationalizations. Pushed far enough, the musical might develop some works of consistent merit; but presently it is merely another plaything for the suburban spectator, combining culture and *kitsch* in carefully measured doses.

The Domestic Psychodrama

If the Westport comedy is a neutral reflection of the spectator's extra-curricular sex life, and the musical caters to his more extensive cultural experience, Broadway's serious plays dramatize his received ideas and attitudes. The most popular form of the 'fifties—created by almost every playwright with artistic aspirations—is the domestic psychodrama, a pseudo-clinical study of maladjusted heroes and heroines, usually in their family surroundings. Brimming with insights and embodying popular ideas of psychoanalysis, the psychodrama has almost completely replaced the leftist melodrama of the 'thirties and the liberal message play of the 'forties. It owes much of its popularity to the fact that, unlike Marxism, watered down Freudianism is an ideology that can be affirmed by playwright and spectator alike.

The success of the psychodrama is such that it has influenced older dramatists like Elmer Rice and Maxwell Anderson, and even playwrights as distinctive as Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams.*

* Miller, essentially a social dramatist who probably would have been more direct if he wrote in the 'thirties, has tended more and more to wrap his political themes in psychological actions, possibly to get his plays accepted readily by an audience indifferent to didactic works. A straightforward early play, like *All My Sons,* contains few depth-insights, but later plays like *Death of a Salesman* and *View From the Bridge* are loaded with them. Miller's "common man" is still his central character, but he has now developed severe neurotic as well as social stigmata. Willy Loman, for example, might have found peace in a new social system, but he could more easily have found it in a psychiatric clinic,

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But it is primarily in the plays of William Inge, Arthur Laurents, Paddy Chayefsky, Michael Gazzo, and a score of lesser known dramatists, that the psychodrama achieves its clearest outlines. In tone, its identifying characteristic is an air of scientific detachment. The playwright, suspending moral judgment toward his characters, assumes instead an attitude of sympathetic impartiality. Meanwhile, the atmosphere is kept as neutral as an analyst's waiting room, and the dialogue is as dry and revelatory as the droning confessions of a patient on a couch.

Typically, the psychodrama revolves around two people, husband and wife, master and mistress, father and son, mother and daughter, who grope toward each other but are unable to connect because of some misunderstanding or emotional problem. Once the obstacle is removed, the characters are able to "grow" in understanding and compatibility. In Inge's *Dark at the Top of the Stairs,* a married couple are estranged because of their contradictory demands, and when each of them compromises a little, they are reconciled and ascend the stairs to make love; in Chayefsky's *Middle of the Night,* a young divorced girl and her elderly employer fall in love, despite the gap in their ages and the advice of their friends, and understanding the neurotic basis for their attraction, they decide to marry anyway and hope for a few years of happiness; in Laurents's *Clearing in the Woods,* the heroine, a neurotic and promiscuous girl, works through her problems with her father by reliving her past, and is finally able to find fulfillment with her third husband when she learns to stop dreaming and come to terms with the ordinary.

Each of these plays, of course, might have been inspired by an

while Eddy Carbone is a victim less of capitalist exploitation than of his own incestuous and homosexual desires.

Williams, on the other hand, uses some of the devices of the psychodrama to disguise his indictment of society's sexual conventions. Behind most of his plays, lies the author's implicit exaltation of the neurotic personality, but Williams's own attitude is sufficiently ambiguous so that many of his "sick" plays might be interpreted as propaganda for psychological health. Blanche DuBois is clearly the heroine of *Streetcar,* but it is the family iconography—father, mother, and child—on which the curtain descends. In contrast with the "defeated" heroes and heroines of Williams's drama, the sexually normal characters are the ones who survive, and the only affirmation the author ever speaks comes through the mouths of pregnant women. Despite all this, neither Miller nor Williams writes typical psychodramas because heavily buried under the psychological overlay lie strong social and personal attitudes.

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anxious letter to Dr. Rose Franzblau ("Can a girl find happiness in the arms of a man thirty years her senior?"), and, in answering the question, each playwright assumes the function of a psychological counselor, dispensing routine wisdom in dramatic form. As a result, the hero of these plays is involved less in conflict with the other characters than in "inter-personal relations" with them. "Maturity" is his ideal goal, and the climax of the play occurs when he is adjusted to the compromises and complexities of family life.

The psychodramatist displays his most striking gifts in his accurate observation of commonplace facts; Chayefsky, in particular, has a talent for communicating the way things look, smell, and sound. Skirting the political issues of the past, the dramatist is also able to avoid vague abstractions and simple-minded dialectics. As a result, one finds a more complicated definition of character and added dimensions of motive and feeling, for the *dramatis personae* of the psychodrama are no longer catalogued according to preconceived social ideas. The psychodramatic hero may find his salvation in "love" just as inevitably as the leftist hero found his in social reform, but this is now accompanied by a wistful and nostalgic understanding of the painful sacrifices involved.

On the other hand, the psychodrama achieves its added complexities at the cost of a severe narrowing of vision and diminution of energy. The typical play of the 'thirties opened out, concluding with the hero leaving home to begin an independent life in opposition to the prevailing social system. The typical play of the 'fifties closes in, for it documents the hero's hangdog return to the hearth. The "maturity" he achieves is revealed as an extremely limiting quality, for it leads not to independence of thought and action but to restricted experience and knowledge—family security becomes the extent of his ambitions. Seeking safety rather than danger, avoiding all risks, he learns about as much about the heights and depths of life as the passive spectator who contemplates his action.

Thus, Ralphie, the protagonist of *Awake and Sing,* could once say, "I wanna make up my own mind about things . . . be something!" Rubin Flood, in *Dark at the Top of the Stairs,* makes the best of what he has because the outside world is dark and troublesome: "I dunno what to think of things now, Cora. I'm a stranger in the very land I was born in." Absorbed in his hero's domestic

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problems, the psychodramatist neglects to confront the difficult, often insoluble problems of the world beyond the home; while the self is under careful scrutiny, the society in which that self is defined is conspicuously absent—no doubt carried off, as in *J.B.*, by an off-stage explosion of the hydrogen bomb. In other words, by employing Freudian depth techniques, the psychodramatist manages to ignore Freud's wider insight that the demands of the individual and of the culture are often in conflict.

The missing society, of course, is never too far away: part of it remains where it has always been, in the orchestra and mezzanine of the theater. I think we may conclude that the playwright's silence about society is partly due to his reluctance to probe the audience in any painful or tender areas. It is no accident that the only social manifestations touched on in this drama are anti-Semitism and racial intolerance, for these are prejudices from which the suburban spectator believes himself free (no dramatist, including Lorraine Hansberry, has ever risked failure by questioning this belief). But more than this, the psychodrama capitulates to the spectator by describing life the way he likes to see it, not the way it is. With adjustment and maturity the ideal goals of the drama, the emphasis shifts to the spectator's theories rather than his actions, while limited and mediocre aspirations are elevated to the position of sublime epiphanies. The psychodramatic hero begins at a point of understanding some distance below the understanding of the spectator. His final revelation brings him just up to the spectator's level, and the audience can then leave the theater in a perfect orgy of togetherness and self-congratulation.

Mirror Talk in Times Square

All these new forms indicate that Broadway, despite its new innovations, is still producing an art of appeasement, the difference being that a new kind of audience is now being appeased. The new American drama is certainly superior to the drama of the 'forties, but, after all, this period was one of the dreariest in memory. Compared with the 'thirties, contemporary forms seem unusually narrow and constricted. The tired businessman, for all his famous fatigue and dedication to Philistia, at least had a theater which was various, energetic, free from self-consciousness, and often highly enjoyable. The suburban spectator, on the other hand, for all his cultural as-

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pirations, supports a theater which is occasionally distinguished, but more often vapid, neutral, de-energized, and pretentious. Broadway has undoubtedly revised upwards its estimate of the audience's intelligence, but its more sophisticated forms are, nevertheless, more rigid than ever, and a good deal more restricting to the imagination.

There is no sinister design behind this. It is the inevitable consequence of an age in which the gap between the consumers and creators of the theater has considerably narrowed. In the past, a theater man was often alienated from the audience automatically by virtue of his different politics, income, education, and background. Today these distinctions are disappearing. Producers, playwrights, directors, actors, and even reviewers are beginning to share with the spectators the same ways of life, standards of success, and artistic pretenses.* The age of Mike Todd is over; the time of David Susskind begins. Thus, Broadway drama, at its most typical, is a pleasant conversation between the audience and the stage into which no note of controversy or disagreement is ever introduced. Today, when suburban values are falling in ruins about our ears, when the most striking thing about our culture is the wide chasm between what is affirmed and what is practiced, this dialogue has all the significance of a talk before a mirror in a sealed off room.

* *Cf.* Arthur Miller: "I've gone to a University, and I've spent a good many years reading, studying and so on—but I don't think that anything that I feel is alien to what pretty much the average American feels. And I don't think I know more than he does." He is talking about the "common man" but his remarks are more appropriate in reference to the suburban spectator.

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THE ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT DRAMA

More than any other art the drama is dominated by fashion, for the good reason that it is the art most dominated by personalities. Theater people know, for the most part, only theater people. If they are important enough, actors have plays written for them and playwrights have reviewers rooting for them. Whatever its gossip, its factions, its hatreds, the theater looks after its own. To reverse Lionel Trilling's famous dictum, it will preserve at any cost the illusions its own snobbery generates. With enough personal force and style, a man of the theater—playwright, actor, or critic—can create a fashion which nothing, except the laws of inertia that govern all performances, will destroy.

There is a simple explanation of all this: the theater is the only art which, in England at least, has no truck with the intellectuals. Sooner or later every other art form, with the possible exception of the cinema, is subjected to dispassionate analysis by men who are as committed to the implications of the work as to the practical details. Granted, the intellectuals usually create theories of art which, like the artist's own, are more interesting than useful. But they also create standards; they argue out their judgments; they reason from their personal impressions. In a word, they think. And this makes for a certain free and disinterested space around the subject in which fresh air can circulate. Now thinking is a tradition that has hardly affected the British theater since the death of Ben Jonson. A few maverick foreigners have managed it: Goethe, Buechner, Brecht or, on a more superficial level, Sartre. But the English stage has had to make do with, at best, conversation pieces. From time to time, of course, ideas go around; Shaw's plays are full of them. But as one knows from elsewhere than the theater—from coffee bars, cocktail parties or faculty meetings—ideas can flourish independently of thinking. Shaw's characters exchange ideas with the canny enthusiasm of small boys exchanging marbles, but they have no truck with the endless difficulty of registering experience freshly, of organizing and judging it according to standards one has lived out. A good dramatist may master ideas well enough to create from them lively conversation, but the pressure of lived experience which gives them life and validity is not usually his concern. To judge from their prose statements, for example, John Osborne and Arnold Wesker might be rather muddled

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schoolboys, not the enormously talented playwrights they in fact are. Of course, the theater is a peculiarly specialized art, technical beyond any other literary form. As such it has attracted a special kind of intelligence and has its own specialized satisfactions. But there is no reason in the world why anyone or any art should be specialized to the point of inanity, or conventionalized to the point where it is cut off from the ordinary processes of the intelligence.

I have made so much of this rather obvious point because the conventions of the London theater have altered a great deal in the last few years. There is a healthy sign of decreasing specialization; there are stirrings of significance and life. Early in the 'fifties nothing seemed deader than the British stage. The standard of acting, of course, was very high and notable justice was done to the routine classics. But every new play went according to a fixed plan. "The scene," the program would say, "is the drawing-room of Mr. and Mrs. Murgatroyd-Winterbotham's house overlooking Regent's Park. The time is the present. One morning in May." The curtain would duly rise on the usual sham but tasteful Regency. The phone would ring. The usual maid would enter.

Maid: The Murgatroyd-Winterbotham residence. No, I'm afraid Madam is not at home. Oh yes, of course, Mrs. Manningham-Gillingham. No, I don't know when she'll be back. (*Confidentially and rather excited*) She went out last night after dinner and hasn't returned. The master seems very worried. He scarcely touched his kidneys at breakfast. (A noise off) Yes Mrs. Manningham-Gillingham, I'll tell her (replaces receiver). Oh *Madam*! (Enter Mrs. M.W. a smart little blonde in her mid-thirties. She looks tired and upset. Her mink coat is awry.)

Not even T. S. Eliot, when he turned popular playwright, had the energy or imagination to break the mode. Hence those disastrous Happy Families of his, with their gin-and-water omniscience and martyrdom.

Yet somehow, in the last three or four years, the miracle has happened, the conventions have changed. To be sure, conventions of a kind still abound but at least they are new. The theater is still very much a middle-class entertainment; the booking, the treck to the West End remove all spontaneity from play-going; it becomes a major family event. Hence the success of Frederick Lonsdale, Noel Coward, Terence Rattigan and the rest depends on the manner in which they all, in their slightly different ways, cater to the spacious suburban dream; while Christopher Fry is to poetry what Stockbrokers' Tudor is to architecture. Now in the late 'fifties, the audience is much the same but the middle-class image of itself, its known facts and willed fantasies, have changed. After all, during the last few years the genteel have taken a

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terrible beating. The wealthy remain what they were, but the middle income group has been taxed to the point of collapse. Their facade of cheerful respectability grows more and more precarious and their prospects are grim. So the world of drawing-room comedy, with its servants, Bentleys, night-clubs and more or less discreet extra-marital relationships, no longer corresponds even to the haziest yearnings, much less to the cold facts of life in Wimbledon, Kensington and Maida Vale. Niceness is all no longer. So the drawing-room drama plays to smaller and smaller audiences for shorter and shorter runs. Not even the most conventional registers of lower middlebrow taste, the critics in the evening papers, feel they have to take it particularly seriously. When one of Lonsdale's plays was revived recently with great elaboration and a particularly glowing cast, the producer made a telling alteration: he shifted the time of the thing from the mid-Depression 'thirties to 1913, that fabulous age before the flood, when England and the bourgeoisie were still something. The implication was that drawing-room comedy, to be enjoyed, now had to be taken as a period piece, like its Restoration ancestor or Romantic tragedy.

The change in taste and convention is largely the work of two theater groups: George Devine's English Stage Company, whose theater is the Royal Court in Sloane Square, and Joan Littlewood's Theater Workshop, who perform at the Theater Royal in the Stratford of East London, not Upon Avon. Between them they have altered the whole theatrical scene. First, they have given the stage a new freedom by introducing a great deal of modern work from abroad: Beckett, Arthur Miller, Lorca, O'Neill, Ionesco and many others. In this way the whole domain of drama has changed, the drawing-room furniture has been scrapped, and the inertia of sensibility that ruled over it has gone too. A new range of experience as well as a profusion of new theatrical techniques has been made possible. And suddenly it has become clear that England in its turn has a whole generation of experimental writers and producers who had been waiting for the chance to say their say. Granted, their say has been patchy, much of it bad, the avant-gardism is mostly tiresome *chi-chi,* and the Court has been conned by some terrible frauds. But the new work has been performed; after the long winter the river has begun to flow again.

The second change in the theater might be called a Left-Wing conversion. It has been a muddled process but it began, as it may well end, with the discovery of Bertolt Brecht. Five years ago hardly anyone in England had even heard of him. Then the Berliner Ensemble performed in London in German; Theater Workshop gave a translated

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Mother Courage its British premiere; and the Royal Court staged *The Good Woman of Setzuan.* One of the most influential of the drama critics met Brecht in Berlin and underwent a positively Pauline conversion to socialism. Since then, social realism has been the word.

The direct influence of Brecht is still small, though most of Miss Littlewood's distinctive mannerisms as a producer can be traced back to his theories. His indirect influence, however, is very large. I mean something rather more than his politics. For Brecht was a major writer before he was a Communist, and in spite of it. This means that in his best work his politics make themselves felt not by any tiresome didacticism but by serious human concern with justice and goodness which—at his best, I repeat—have nothing to do with any party line. But politics he had, and this, in a century in which nearly all major writers have either kept wholly apart from politics or been on the Right—the last significant Left-Wing poet was Shelley—makes Brecht an extraordinary powerful exception, who had a whole new language of drama to offer. Moreover it was a theatrical language which had been translated most eloquently in the production of Joan Littlewood; hence it seemed the language most likely to produce significant and fresh effects.

I do not, for a moment, wish to give the impression that this change of theatrical style is any sign at all of a great change of heart in the British electorate. Nor fundamentally in the British dramatists. None of the four most promising playwrights who had gotten a hearing as a result of the new fashion—John Osborne, Arnold Wesker, Brendan Behan and Shelagh Delany—seem to have much more than a bright socialist gloss on their work. They are not so much pro-Labour as anti-Establishment. And this is perfectly understandable. Behan apart (he is Irish; therefore his politics are something quite special and, for the non-Irishman, not quite comprehensible), they were all born too late to have lived through any real domestic political conflict. Osborne is the oldest and he, I believe, is my age. That means he was about fifteen when the Labour government was elected after the war; politically, I imagine, he could remember nothing at all of the 'thirties. Wesker is two or three years younger than Osborne, and Miss Delaney about six years younger than Wesker. This means that their most lively political experience has very little to do with mass unemployment, strikes and union-busting, and a great deal to do with the forlorn sight of the Welfare State sinking under the paralyzing weight of the bureaucrats until it achieved what J. W. Aldridge has called Welfare Stasis. Their political ideas are probably less defined by enthusiasms and causes than by irritation.

On the stage this irritation takes a specific technical form. They are

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all determined at least not to hoax their own creations. If nothing else, they will stick to the facts and rhythms of modern life. In the new plays toast is burned, clothes are ironed, bobs have to be found for the gas-meter, the empties have to be returned to the pub. The heroes lose their jobs rather than their fortunes, their wives more often than their mistresses. And most important, they talk like living people. The extraordinary thing about the old drawing-room drama was the way even the light social chatter had been formalized until it seemed almost a separate language. T. S. Eliot may, after all, have had a reason for chopping into verse lines the cocktail party repartee of his later plays. He did not succeed in making poetry out of it, in any intensive sense of that term, but he did cannily indicate the degree to which the conventions of this kind of social back-chat had become formal and apart.

The new writers have changed all this. Miss Delaney is said to have been prompted into writing her play by seeing a Terence Rattigan piece while she was still a nineteen-year-old millhand. As everyone does on these occasions, she came out saying "I could do better than that." But unlike most other people, she went away and did so. In all fairness, Miss Delaney does not have anything like as sharp an eye for a dramatic situation as Rattigan. A measure of her and her colleagues' superiority is their ear for speech. Their language is slangy, gay, messy, irreverent; it is, in short, the real thing, just as their feelings come from a shared experience rather than from some trumped-up device. It is this straightforwardness of pity and gusto that makes Behan's *The Hostage* superior, I think, to Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood*. In both works there is a certain spurious, cossetted vitality. As with so much modern Celtic art, the line between Life—with a capital L—and Blarney is so delicate as not to be always discernible. But Behan's vitality at least manifests itself in terms of people rather than in a willed excess and trickery of language.

The strength of Osborne, Wesker, Delaney and Behan is precisely in their commitment to realism. This guarantees them such an immediate impact that it often masks the fact that social realism has itself become a convention. It is a convention of talk. Provided the dramatists can create a truth of talk they are absolved from that other truth of dramatic inevitability. Without exception their plays all fade out in the last act. The audience is left simply with "a slice of life," while the cycle of life—the process in which character and circumstance act upon each other until they are resolved in an irresistible action—is ignored. I suggest that despite appearances, the dominant influence in the new British drama is not Brecht, who was a master of dramatic ten-

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sion; it is instead the documentary film. For the documentary merely presents, while the artist presents in order to resolve; which brings us back to that question of thinking.

Arnold Wesker's *Roots,* for example, is unquestionably the best play now on in London. Wesker has extraordinary insight into unlikely people, an uncannily accurate ear for dialogue, and a nice sense of irony at his own expense. Moreover, he has also flung an idea or two into the ring. But he has, as yet, no sense at all of what it feels like to live ideas so that they are implicit in every action. He may talk about intellectuals, but his own intelligence works through the shrewdness of his ear. The result is that his work, like Osborne's, leaves you most strongly with a great impression of artistic muddle. At the end of *Roots* all the implications of family loyalty and hatred, all the criticism of the seemingly blameless young intellectual cad, are left in the air. The heroine's revelation is simply a gift of the gab, which apparently makes all the trickery and corruption worthwhile. No doubt Wesker is perfectly sincere about what he says; but sincerity only counts in a work of art when it is transformed into *artistic* conscience, forcing the material to whatever its latent but inevitable conclusion may be. Fundamentally, all satisfying drama is Aristotelian.

Perhaps all four of these dramatists have yet to produce objective works of art; so far they have been concerned with portraits of the artists as young men. If their work is inconclusive, that may be because not enough has happened to them. The danger is that their talent to do the partial thing is such that it has created of itself a convention and a fashion. Before the age of thirty they are becoming models for other writers. In, for instance, a recent Royal Court production called *Sugar in the Morning,* the author Donald Howarth was so obviously delighted with his ability to put real people on the stage and make them talk as he has heard them, that he apparently never bothered to think up a plot until, at the last moment, he found himself stuck for an ending.

There is plenty of writing talent in England, just as there are talented producers like Joan Littlewood and William Gaskill to do it justice, and at least one brilliant new stage designer—Sean Kenny, a pupil of Frank Lloyd Wright, who got his start at the Royal Court and has now been given a much bigger chance at the new Mermaid Theater. But the question is whether the talent will develop according to its own toughest artistic instincts, or whether the anti-intellectual esotericism of the theater will turn it into just another transient and self-stultifying fashion.

A. Alvarez

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Gore Vidal

LOVE, LOVE, LOVE

"Love love love love love love love love love love" give or take a few "loves" was the entire lyric of a song by Charlie Chaplin and I, herewith, propose that it be adopted as the American theater's official anthem. Just name your problem, sit back and let love solve it: race prejudice, foreign relations, even Job reeling beneath the unkind attentions of a dubious Yale God gets off the hook at the end through Love, which has now replaced the Third Act Marines of a simpler time. On those rare occasions when some other solution tries to creep into the popular theater it either fails or else survives once whatever alien gold was in it has been transmuted to base Love by the alchemy of production. Granted Mr. Arthur Miller worries his head about Problems of the day, but as for his heart, well, scratched he bleeds Love. Even that attention we must pay his salesman is but a command to love him.

Our popular theater ponders, to the exclusion of all else, the pathos of Love withheld, of Love lost, of Love found after three acts of jittery footling while the man learns Tenderness (never the woman since, according to commercial lore, Woman *knows*). Moon-guided, triple-crowned, inscrutable, American woman in our theater is never so wise as when she's not thinking at all, just being, and listening with a tiny smile to the third act speech of the man who has had to learn Tenderness the hard way. "Gosh, Marge, I know how it was but it won't be like that no more, honest, baby, it won't. No, sir, when I got knocked down in that fight with that two-hundred pound woman in Salt Lake I knew what we had was all there is and I'm gonna change, Marge, I swear because that's all there is, what we got . . . love." And Marge (played by an actress weighing in at ninety-seven tensely muscular pounds) opens her arms slowly as though semaphoring bad news to a foundering ship; she takes his great empty buffalo head in her arms. "It's all right, Walter," she says in a voice meant to be tender though *aficionados* will detect the approaching kill in this last *veronica*. "I'm here, Walter." And the curtain falls.

Yet, in all fairness to our commercial theater, the preoccupation

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with Love was thrust upon it by the society it reflects or tries to. And by Love the theater does not mean love in the Rousseau sense (to employ him as Romantic touchstone, pre-Agony). Nor is Love anything quite so simple as successful copulation though that of course is of coeval (as Mr. Faulkner would say) importance; after all, one of the few goals our friendly society has set us is the more perfect union; the general failure to achieve it, of course, ensures full employment to mental therapists, causes dramatic religious conversions and, in the case of one talented theater director, has driven him to pad obsessively the crotches of the less flamboyantly hung actors (Aristophanes would have found a joke in that; we can't). No, Love in our theater is not really sex though sex is part of it. Love is a warm drugged-ness, a surrender of the will and the mind to inchoate feelings of Togetherness. Thought is the enemy; any exercise of mind betrays Love, and Love's vengeance in the theater is terrible for mind must be broken and made to recant, and then to love Love. But before we score the silliness of our popular theater, we ought to recognize that it reflects always more baldly than the novel, say, the superstitions and prejudices of the day. The flabbiness of tone in the theater differs only in its over-simplified effects from the same flabbiness in the popular (and sometimes "serious") novel and, to get to the root, it does no more than reflect the ubiquitous flab of the Great Golfer's reign. Whether Tocqueville's worst fears have come true or not, democracy is too much with us. It has been duly noted how often people now say "I feel" such-and-such to be so rather than "I think" such-and-such to be so. To make that shift of verb unconsciously is to eschew mind and take cover in the cozier, more democratic world of feeling. I suppose there are some who say of others pejoratively: his feelings are not deep, but, pressed, they would admit that no one really knows what another's feelings are though it is of course agreed that we are all pretty much alike at heart: sensitive, warm, tender, our moments of bad behavior the result of the green twig's early bending, sure to straighten and flower beneath Love's therapeutic sun. In any case, feeling is all in our theater and the deliberate exercise of mind is thought an admission of emotional poverty. Particularly mistrusted is Bernard Shaw whose works are dismissed as displays of debater tricks, the plots suitable only for adaptation as musical comedies. He did not love Love; worse, he made the Devil a Love lover and chose as hero Don Juan, a mere life lover.

Now it is almost too easy to put down Broadway. So much of what's wrong is so obvious that most attacks on our theater lose force because of the target's size. It is impossible with a shotgun at three paces not to hit the Shubert theater. Yet it is curious how often the serious-minded

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do miss the essential target. For instance, not long ago, a lively young critic fired a familiar blast: no ideas in our theater, too many sensational productions *épater le box office,* too many writers revealing sexual obsessions of depressing singularity . . . all the usual changes were rung but then the critic titled his piece "The Theater Is Losing Its Minds," and confused everything. I don't know how far back his memory both actual and learned goes, but if there were ever any minds operative in the American theater it is news to me. Before Eugene O'Neill (whose mastery of ideas was second to none, unless it be his fellow Nobelist Miss Pearl Buck), there was a wasteland of Owen Davises, Avery Hopwoods and Eugene Walters, stretching back to the egregious Royall Tyler who started the American theater on its mindless way. Two centuries of junk. If anything there are rather more signs of intelligence stirring now than in the bad old days.

Then, a few months later, our critic was back again. This time he wondered why the better novelists did not bring "mind" to the theater? Or at least why hadn't the theater produced playwrights as good as the novelists on Today's List, and he gave the list, betraying himself, I'm afraid, as an incipient Love lover. Every year there is a short list of the O.K. writers. Today's List consists of two Jews, two Negroes and a safe floating *goy* of the old American Establishment (often Mr. Wright Morris) just to show there is no prejudice in our loving world; only the poor old homosexualists are out. It is a list dictated not by any esthetic but by Good Citizenship. That the writers on it happen to be admirable is irrelevant: Togetherness put them there and we all feel better seeing them belaureled. Now my young critic is not responsible for Today's List but he showed a certain absence of mind in trying to beat the playwrights with it, because not one of the writers named could be thought of as an intellectual in the sense I assumed he meant (Gide, Camus, even the dervish Genet). They are all good, if fairly standard, writers, more or less in the naturalistic tradition and, at least in their novels, betray no more mind than do the plays of Mr. Arthur Miller.

I find this sort of mistake (taking good writers of one sort and saying they are good writers of quite another sort on the grounds that to be good is good enough) singularly depressing and yet another sign of the general corruption of esthetic and intellectual values in this soft age. The language of criticism now tends to be as inexact as the prose of the works criticized. No one seems to know who or what anyone or anything is. Prevalent is a lazy permissiveness. Our literature as well as our theater seems at times like a terrible kindergarten. Jack is a great novelist because he *feels* he's a great novelist. Anything goes. I am sometimes charmed by the minor talent of Mr. J. D. Salinger but when he

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puts on his Great Author suit I think one should point out it doesn't fit. On every side counterfeit talents flood the exchange. To a certain degree this was always so but there were, in other times and places, certain critics whose bite authenticated coinage. They are still with us, but *hors de combat,* in the Academy.

I have often thought it would be a service to the audience if each writer was forced to refer to himself in a certain style and manner which would make clear what he is. Implicitly, each does but it is confusing to all but a student of rhetoric. Mr. Arthur Miller (he is on my mind because I have just read the preface to his collected plays) writes of himself not seriously but solemnly. With paralyzing pomp, splitting his infinitives, confusing number, he climbs the steps to the throne, the enemy, syntax, crushed beneath his heavy boot: he is our prophet, our king, our guide in the dark; the only thing wrong is he does not write awfully well. Now in other times if one had made such a criticism it would have been quite enough. But Mr. Miller is ready for that one (and so are all the other hackers in the kindergarten). "We have had," he reminds those of us who were nodding, "more than one extraordinary dramatist who was a cripple as a writer, and this is lamentable but not ruinous." I suppose he could get out of that one by saying he meant extraordinary to mean just that: extra-ordinary, though of course there is nothing more ordinary than writer-cripples in our theater.

Now by needling the pretensions of Mr. Miller (whom I often admire as a writer-cripple) I don't mean to scout his rightful position in the commercial theater—he is more good than bad as an influence and as a fact—but to draw attention again to the lack of any sense in our esthetic judgments. Mr. Miller—and all the rest—can get away with just about any evaluation he wants to make of himself, and those who know differently won't bother to straighten the matter out for an audience which seems perfectly content to receive counterfeit bills for checks drawn in good faith. What we need are fewer ontological critics (*pace* Mr. Ransom) and more critics like Miss Mary McCarthy who will remind the kindergarteners that though they can have as much fun as they want, at some point the line between fantasy and reality must be firmly drawn. No, you are *not* a poet; you are you. As it is now even our abler commentators are so many Madame Verdurins, eager, shrewd but confused as to true precedence. And the non-counterfeit artist must either go into table last or make a fool of himself, much as the Baron de Charlus did that curious afternoon.

I happen to like a number of playwrights as people. For some reason they bring out my protective and pedagogic instincts. I like to reassure them; to help them; to give them reading lists. In many ways

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they are to be admired for stamina, since to be produced on Broadway resembles nothing so much as being shot out of a cannon at a fragile net. One should not be surprised if the more sensitive dramatists tend to get a bit punchy. Most of them (I am generalizing hugely but life is short) experience serious difficulty reading books, which necessarily limits their fund of general information on any subject not connected with the theater or their own psychoanalysis. The literary world, to the extent they are aware of it at all, seems to them an invidious establishment where writers dislike them because they are better known and make more money than any other sort of writer. They are in this not entirely mistaken. But they do not realize that having no interest in language and even less in what we like to think of as mind, they necessarily must earn the contempt of those who do bother with such things. The result is that although in its essential preoccupations our theater cannot help but reflect the *Zeitgeist,* it has always been estranged not only from its own country's culture but, to strike that minatory gong, from Western civilization. The result has been a curiously artificial development, resembling nothing but itself, like those amoebae who when boxed upon a slide stop their anarchic zooming about and make perfect right angles, as tribute to an imposed environment.

"Weariness of the theater is the prevailing note of London criticism. Only the ablest critics believe that the theater is really important; in my time, none of them would claim for it as I claimed for it, that it is as important as the Church was in the Middle Ages. . . ." Ah, that crisp hopeful voice! Shaw in 1906. "A theater to me is a place where two or three are 'gathered together.' The apostolic succession from Eschylus to myself is as serious and as continuously inspired as that younger institution, the apostolic succession of the Christian Church." Brave words, and perhaps true though there have not been very many American gatherings-together we could, with any confidence, have invited William Morris to attend. But the weariness of tone endures. Intellectuals with much justice hold our popular theater in contempt and one of the reasons seldom explicitly stated is not so much the meretriciousness of the exhibits—at best popular art is opportunist—but its moments of would-be seriousness. Mr. Milton Berle telling low-comedy jokes on stage can be very beguiling; but to be lectured to in a stern tone by a writer considerably more stupid than much of his audience is a somber experience and were our collective manners not better, theater seats would be torn up and hurled at the stage. Earnest Neanderthals implore us not to persecute minority groups; they exhort us to tenderness; they inform us that war is destructive; they remind us that love is the only connection. Now there is nothing wrong with these themes

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except the blunt obviousness with which they are handled and the self-righteous tone of writers whose esthetic derives partly from the mental therapists, and partly from those urgent dramas that once made radio wonderful. It is not that one does not admire Mr. Arthur Miller's real gifts for theater writing nor his good heart. It is his stunning solemnity which annoys. Stop telling us what we already know! And don't write sentences like: "That he had not the intellectual fluency to verbalize his situation is not the same thing as saying that he lacked awareness, even an overly intensified consciousness that the life he had made was without form and inner meaning." Now that is not a writer writing nor a man trying to get through to others; it is the voice of the holder of a degree in Education; it is the Prophet Jones (without the fantasy); it is Dorothy Schiff. One sympathizes with Mr. Miller's passion to be admired, to be thought significant. All of us tend more or less consciously to arrange our *personas* in an attractive way. But his attempt is saddening because, though he is not taken seriously outside the popular theater and the press, he is almost good enough to be respected in the way he wants and he *should* be good enough: his failure I attribute to the popular theater's estrangement from the country's culture.

In the last fifteen years the French theater was used by Gide, Sartre, Camus, de Montherlant, Genet, Anouilh, Julian Green, Giraudoux, an eclectic list which goes on and on, comprising most of the better French writers. And what have we had? Tennessee Williams (whom I happen to admire), Mr. Miller, one small mood play by Miss Carson McCullers, Mr. Thornton Wilder in his later, three-cheers-for-Love manner and, of course, the heady splendors of *J.B.*

The cult of feeling has not only undone much of our theater writing but it has peculiarly victimized those gentle souls, the actors. They have been taught that "truth" is everything. And what is "truth?" Feeling. And what is feeling? Their own secret core to which the character they are to interpret must be related. To listen to actors talk about "truth" is a chilling experience. They employ a kind of solemn baby-talk compounded of analysts' jargon and the arcane prose of the late Stanislavsky. As one of them said severely of another's performance: "He's not thinking; he's thinking he's thinking." Our actors have also been taught to condemn the better English or French actors as "technical." "Technical" here *seems* to mean—in these circles words are employed for transient emotive effects, never meaning—that a separation has been made between the actor's own feelings and those the part he is playing calls for. To understand just who Iago is, the "technical" actor will deliberately make the separation. Then, having got the proper range, he will, by an effort of will, inhabit the character, using himself

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as much or as little as he pleases, his goal being the interpretation of Shakespeare's Iago, *not* the revelation of his own inner state as he grapples with Iago. Our actors may not be able to say a line of verse intelligibly or begin to understand what Iago is all about but you can bet they will bring floods of irrelevant feeling to the part. It is not acting but group therapy. And the sad thing is that though this kind of acting is usually disagreeable to watch it is delightful to do. They won't change without a struggle, and since they feel rather than think they tend to be fanatics about a method whose queen, of course, is the genuinely gifted Miss Kim Stanley. Yet the whole sad mistaken thing is all there in her large bland face, the small eyes turned inward though they seem to be looking out, the whiney voice rising and falling according to the beat of some inner metronome of "truth," her whole being suffused in a nimbus of self-love. The final effect is onanistic.

For some years I would not read Miss Mary McCarthy's theater criticism after her majestically wrong-headed estimate of "A Streetcar Named Desire." She not only missed the point of the play but, worse, got carried away by irrelevancies: Williams was really a slob, devoted to success, pretending to be a real artist while swinging with the Broadway set and, worst of all, he was guilty of "ambition." She uses this word several times in her collected pieces to tick off those writers who try, sneakily, to get above their talents. Art-climbers are very like social climbers, and Miss McCarthy is a good one to put them down. Now I grant that there is something odd in Tennessee Williams's work which not only enrages quite sane critics but drives them to impute motives to him which, I would suggest, are more the business of post-mortem biography than of criticism. I think again of the young critic who wrote recently in *Encounter* that Williams's real theme was incest. Well, his real theme is *not* incest no matter how one chooses to read the plays. One does not dare speculate on what sort of grape-vine gossip led to this conclusion; thought certainly had nothing to do with it, though feeling might. But aside from Miss McCarthy's forty whacks at Williams, when I finally came to read her collected criticism, I was struck by her remarkable good sense. She is far and away the best American writer to have looked at the American theater in our generation. Uncorrupted by compassion, her rather governessy severity, even cruelty, derives from the useful knowledge that the road to Kitsch is paved with good "ambitions," and that one must not give the "A" for ambition without also giving simultaneously the "E" for the poor thing accomplished. The theater needs continual reminders that there is nothing more debasing than the work of those who do well what is not worth doing at all.

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A minor phenomenon of the theater today is the milieu: kitchens in Kansas, cold-water flats, Bronx apartments, the lower-middle-class *venue* depicted in naturalistic terms by "truthful" actors before an audience of expensively dressed, overfed burghers. How does that audience stand it, even when it's good? Is it that they enjoy a nostalgic frisson at looking back to their own origins? Or is there a desire to know about things today? To observe the instructive narcissism of John Osborne who tells them: this is the way we are, young, angry, unique! And the burghers nod and belch softly and some doze: it is the theater of the Editorial and the Survey. Even those who dislike Tennessee Williams must give him credit for castrating a hero here, eating one there, and with Elia Kazan racketing the actors about the stage it is not easy to sleep. I save any further defense of Williams for another occasion, since my intention in these notes is entirely destructive.

And now where do we go from here? I confess I have no very clear notion of what I would like to see the theater become. As a playwright I am a sport, whose only serious interest is the subversion of a society which bores and appals me (no world elsewhere, alas; this is the one to fix). Unlike my *confrères,* I have no delusions about my theatrical talents which are, to say the least, haphazard (as I write these dishonest words, I catch myself smiling tightly, lower teeth clamping hard on upper bridge: I shall do such things . . .!) All in all, I don't see much change for the good. Plays cost too much to put on. That means investors will be wary of new things. I also suspect that despite the enviable example of the French, our comparable good writers are not apt to be much of an improvement on the ones already in the theater. As Flaubert observed, the theater is not an art but a secret, and unless the riddle's answer comes easily I don't think it worth the time of the serious writer. In England, the Royal Court theater has offered hospitality to some of the better writers but the plays so far produced have been disappointing. In fact, it may very well be that the simple-mindedness we score in our playwrights is a necessary characteristic.

In any case, there is no use in worrying about Broadway. Expect less rather than more intelligence on the stage, especially as costs increase. Revel in the graver efforts which will more and more resemble *J.B.*—that portentous magnum of chloroform Mr. Elia Kazan so accurately broke across our collective brows, launching us upon a glum sea anodyne. In fact, the former Assistant Secretary of State may well have got our age's number back in the 'thirties when he decided that a poem should not mean but be. Our theater certainly does not mean; it is. Yet to the extent it is, it mirrors us. Look in it and you will see quite plain the unLoved face of Caliban.

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Harold Clurman

THE ACHIEVEMENT OF BERTOLT BRECHT

The trouble with theoretical discussion in the arts—most emphatically in the theater—is that it often turns our attention away from the work itself and leads us into a semantic maze. A flagrant example of this is much of the writing which has accompanied or preceded the production of Bertolt Brecht's plays. Many more people have discussed Brecht and his theories than have seen his plays or read his poems.

There are several reasons for this. Brecht's plays are in German and are not easily translatable. Though Brecht himself has said that his plays do not necessarily have to be produced in the manner he himself employed as a director, I have yet to see a production in any other manner which does his plays justice.

Yet these plays, whether their language is understood or not, cannot fail to make an impression. They are "different"; they look "new." Without being in the least obscure, they strike the eye as much more "modern" than do the plays by the innovators of the contemporary French theater. Brecht's plays lend themselves to controversy of all sorts —literary, theatrical, political.

The point so admirably made and elaborated in John Willett's very useful and thoroughly sensible introduction to Brecht's work* is that the only proper way to know Brecht is to see the production of his plays in the theater he founded (the Berlin Ensemble) or at least to read them—if possible in the original. Brecht's theoretical writing—stimulating and instructive though it be—does not convey the "feel" of what he has created.

It was inevitable that Brecht should become the subject of every type of exegesis. For his is the only manifestation of a total theater style (text and presentation in organic relationship) since the emergence

The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht: A Study From Eight Aspects. By John Willett. New Directions. $8.00.

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of the Moscow Art Theater with its climactic peak in the plays of Chechov and the corresponding development of the so-called Stanislavsky system or Method.

The modern theater has known such influences as those of symbolism, expressionism, constructivism—impulses and tendencies which characterize certain writers, scene designers, directors, but hardly any of which shaped themselves into a complete body of work with any permanent organ to institutionalize them on every level of stagecraft. That is why no one today speaks of an opposition between Stanislavsky and symbolism or expressionism, while there is much talk of Brecht's practice as anti-Stanislavsky.

I mention this aspect of the Brechtian phenomenon for historical reasons only: it is not really fundamental. To approach Brecht as a stage director in "opposition" to the teachings of Stanislavsky is as critically bright as to point out that Brecht wrote plays that do not resemble Chechov's. The Stanislavsky method—as distinguished from the nature of his productions—is not a style and does not by itself lead to a particular style. It is a craft technique of instruction for actors. Brecht's style is intimately related to what he had to say and is the mark of his contribution as an artist.

Brecht's plays are picaresque, poetic narrations for the stage. They are based on brief episodes of concentrated action—most of them almost complete in themselves—each of which makes a simple sharp point essential to the understanding of the play's idea as a whole. The intellectual approach is tersely factual, the tone ironic, crisp and detached. Songs in a similar vein embody the ideological point as in an epigram. The aim is frankly didactic. One play tells us that war debases everything and everyone, even those who seem to be outside its antagonisms. Another play tells us that it is virtually impossible to "do good" in a corrupt society. These are morality plays as certainly as anything ever written in the Middle Ages in behalf of the Church.

If you read Brechtian manuals you will learn that Brecht espoused the esthetics of the Chinese and Japanese theaters rather than the Aristotelian esthetic. You will learn that Brecht eschews "suspense," that his dramatic goal is not excitement but understanding. He wants his audience, it is said, to recognize its place in society, and how it (the audience) can help change that society. He tries to induce in the spectator the attitude of an alert observer rather than that of a hypnotized person who seeks to be swept away by the show. He wants his public to use its critical judgment and ultimately its capacity to act, rather than to be

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drugged or overwhelmed by a suffused emotionalism which can have no effect on its thought patterns and social behavior.

All this may be interesting, but if not perceived through the plays themselves it is actually misleading. For the fact is that these plays with their somewhat ribald humor—part folk canniness and part twentieth-century sophistication—their starkly naive "stories," their rude simplicity, their dry, yet poignant songs—witty homilies or grave and austere preachments—inspire a sense of nobility, a kind of humane asceticism which is cleansing and elevating. The spareness of the plays is sinewy; their slightly astringent timbre which might easily be mistaken for cynicism is invigorating; their pathos—and they have a pathos at times bordering on sentimentality—is classically serene.

What about the anti-emotionalism of Brecht's *esthetique*? It exists chiefly there. Emphasis on it was made by Brecht himself both to purify the hysterical atmosphere which choked the German expressionist theater and to counteract the orotundity and stomachic stress of "traditional" German acting. Just as there is as much "emotion" in the Parthenon as in Chartres Cathedral, as much in Stravinsky as in Tschaikowsky, so there are very few contemporary plays which provoke as much "emotion" as Brecht's masterpiece *Mother Courage*. To define the difference of "emotion" in each case is to discover the true nature of each particular work.

The artist does what he is, he makes what he can. Brecht's productions are what they are because they constitute the visible, palpable form of what he has written. Because he found the appropriate delivery, lighting, stage design for what he had to say, he was a great master, just as the Moscow Art Theater in its day achieved mastery by finding the right stage form for the Russian realists.

How confused and confusing most explanations of Brecht's work are (including at times his own—unless they are read chronologically and in continuity) may be judged by a quote in John Willett's book. In criticizing the German classical stage Brecht said, "There is little chance of hearing any genuine human voice, and one gets the impression that life must be exactly like a theater instead of the theater being just like life." Was Brecht then a realist—for it is presumably the realist school which aimed to make the theater "just like life." In Brecht's productions we are constantly reminded that we are in the theater—the electrical apparatus is exposed, the actors often address themselves directly to the audience, mottoes are flashed on a screen, etc. etc.—all purely theatrical devices and certainly non-realistic.

Such confusion arises, I repeat, when we substitute argument over

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artistic terminology for actual contact with the work of art. Brecht's theater is theatrical theater *and* very real. He endeavors to avoid ecstatic, stentorian, sweating, tremulous emotionalism, *and* at the same time his work communicates an emotion as lofty as any we know in the theater today.

Another provocation to controversy—particularly among people barely familiar with his writing—is Brecht's politics and his relation to Marxism, the East-West struggle, etc. etc. For the study of Brecht as a man this may be an indispensable vein of inquiry. For an understanding of his plays and poems the subject is much less significant than it is presumed to be. But before entering such a discussion we should ask what corruption demands that an artist be politically "correct" in his work.

There is a duality or ambivalence in Brecht's writing, a dialectic process rooted in a deep-seated skepticism—which Brecht frequently referred to as the mainspring of knowledge. Together with this we find shrewd common sense which counter-balances his persistent moralism. This explains why Brecht changed the ending of his *Galileo* several times to resolve the struggle in the protagonist's (and author's) spirit between his conviction and his "comfort."

Telling too are the lines from one of his poems: "Oh we who wanted to prepare the ground for friendliness cannot ourselves be friendly." Or examine the colloquy between Galileo and his disciple who says to the master, "I have recanted but I am going to live. Your hands are dirty, we said. You said: Better dirty than void." And finally this:

You have two rival spirits
Lodged in you.
You have got to have two.
Stay disputed, undecided!
Stay a unit, stay divided!
Hold to the crude one, hold to the cleaner one!
Hold to the good one, hold to the obscener one!
Hold them united!

No doubt Brecht was deeply influenced by Marx and was often close to (though never a member of) the Party. As with many artists of our time, "what attracted Brecht above all was the humanism of Marxist theories." Their humanism and, I would add, their activism. He could neither remain alien to these impulses nor could he accept all that their votaries did. He would not shun them entirely for much

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of what the votaries did was necessary and desirable. Thus Brecht's political "indecisiveness" lends his work a good deal of its universal relevance and value. For who today is not troubled by the society we live in and, if not a coward, anxious to take steps to alter the course of its destructive march without always being sure of the right means? If Brecht was unorthodox both from the standpoint of the communist and the anti-communist, yet deeply involved in the tension which gave rise to the Marxist movement in general, he was, as far as I am concerned, in one of the healthiest of modern traditions. That is one of the reasons I find his work more central to our times than that of T. S. Eliot, Camus, Genet, Beckett, Ionesco, et al.

Brecht's work has already exerted a beneficent influence on the European theater. And even such partial and not genuinely assimilated influence as may be observed at The Theater East and The Royal Court Theater in London, not to speak of Charles Laughton's production of Shaw's *Major Barbara* in New York, is useful in broadening the scope of our theater concepts and practice.

In fine, Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) is one of the outstanding figures of the contemporary theater and with equal certainty one of the twentieth century's most notable poets.

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Angus Wilson

NEW PLAYWRIGHTS

On rereading various reviews that I have written in recent months on books about the theater, I find that I have committed myself to two apparently contradictory opinions. In commending, with a few reservations, Miss Mary McCarthy's collection of theater notices, I suggested that most intelligent adults, in England at any rate, had for some decades now found the contemporary drama insufficiently serious to merit their attention. In other reviews I have suggested that in the last three years there has been some real stirring of life in the British drama, and, even that there is some possibility of the theater, so long stagnant in all but its presentation, being the first of the literary arts to reflect the changed customs, outlook and conflicts of what may be called the new prosperity England. Is there any real contradiction in these two opinions? I don't think so. Only those who have known a long, cheerless English winter can know why we fuss so over the first aconites; they are rather drearily "modest, little" flowers in themselves, but they may—God knows how unlikely that "may"—herald one of our rare, fine English summers. So it is with our new young dramatists and the lively new managements—Royal Court, Theater Workshop, Stratford, Belgrade at Coventry, '59 at Hammersmith and Meadow Players at Oxford. For once we don't have to put inverted commas around the word young; these new playwrights—or many of them—have yet to see thirty. Their plays offer very little more intellectual substance than those so familiar to us for the last twenty years; but the adolescent silliness of youth, though often tiresome, has not the fearful, deadening effect of the prolonged adolescent silliness we have been used to from our older playwrights or indeed of the sort of vacuity that usually passes for maturity in our theater. We may readily fear that these new dramatists will in their turn be cutting the same juvenile emotional capers that they are now offering us when they can no longer claim youth, even the prolonged writer's kind of youth. The dread comparison between Mr. Noel Coward's "wicked" youth and Mr. Osborne's "angry"

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one has already been made once or twice by critics. But on the whole it is fair to them and not wholly deceiving of ourselves to hope.

The portents, as anyone may see who reads the plays under review here,* are mixed. Most of these new plays really see England as it is now, and that is something; though the theater requires more than up-to-date documentation to hope for salvation. It may, of course, be asked how authors, most of them still under thirty, can make a virtue of portraying the world around them in any other guise than the only one they have known, if realism be their aim. In any medium but the theater the question would be legitimate, but we have been so long used to playwrights, even quite young ones, producing successful stereotypes of life as it has never been known except upon the West End "realistic" stage, that we must congratulate authors even upon having such rudimentary equipment for writing as eyes and ears. Then, the great middle-class strangle-hold upon the English play seems to have been broken; not in its audiences who still remain largely a certain sort of under-occupied middle class, but in the life portrayed upon the stage. For the first time the great percentage of new writers for the stage are working class in origin, and more importantly, not yet so strayed into either professional coffeebarism or into success to have lost an immediate feeling of their background. I am not suggesting that the British working class is more intrinsically interesting than any other class—although I fear some of the new dramatists do suffer from that sentimental illusion. It is a class, however, that for long—almost for fifty years—has been represented in our literature mainly by a stereotype invented by middle-class writers, and even that stereotype has become increasingly dated. It so happens also that the working class is changing very rapidly in England at the moment and the new dramatists on the whole reflect this change. An unexplored social territory and one that may stand as a symbol for the general stir and unrest of contemporary England—this is a good deal on the credit side of the new dramatists to start with. Yet I cannot help thinking that to an American reader or audience the ambience—urban Jewish proletarian—reflected in Mr. Wesker's *Chicken Soup with Barley* and in Mr. Kops' *The Hamlet of Stepney Green*—will hardly seem fresh. The New York stage, I should suppose, had all this in the nineteen-thirties. It is true that the message is no longer naively Marxist—but, alas, there are other messages as naive or more

* A Taste of Honey. By Shelagh Delaney. Grove Press. $3.95.
New English Dramatists: Each His Own Wilderness. By Doris Lessing.
The Hamlet of Stepney Green. By Bernard Kops.
Chicken Soup With Barley. By Arnold Wesker. Penquin Books. $.95.

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so even than the diluted, sentimental, theater Marxism of the pre-war years. The rebellion of the son Tony against his Bohemian, "demo" attending, banner carrying, Left-Wing Mum, which Mrs. Doris Lessing, a former Communist and still a Left demonstrating writer, tries sympathetically to understand in *Each His Own Wilderness*—the rebellion of contemporary English youth is a real one, it is indeed a sympathetic one, but its very essence is its inchoate, emotional, undefinedly "anarchistic" tone. It has sheltered under the collective umbrella of "anti-Establishment," but that cover has already worn thin, revealing a very indiscriminate huddle. Some anti-Establishment men have been already revealed as the New Establishment knocking at the door; these disguised writers have not played much part in the theater of revolt, they are more familiar as the heroes of the now passé angry young novels. But the patently sincere rebels who form the anti-Establishment theater are as ill-assorted a crew: Left Wing Youth genuinely disgusted at the dead conformism of the official Left, asking for a new Left revivalism to combat the apathy bred of opportunist "realism"; young men asking for more "poetry" in life to combat the spreading suburbanism of prosperity; young men asking for any sort of noise that is a rude one; young men asking for less noise and fewer "causes," asking to be left alone; and so on; the patterns of revolt are now all too familiar already. Yet they have produced a lot of new plays. Some rather indifferent, as it must frankly be said, are the three included in the Penguin volume; others, for all their weaknesses, very striking on the stage like Miss Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey,* or *Roots,* the second and much better play of Mr. Arnold Wesker, the author of *Chicken Soup with Barley.*

The inchoate, sentimental realism of their protest, as it happens, marries well with their form. None of these plays—and this goes for the more famous plays of Mr. John Osborne and Mr. Brendan Behan—is well made; indeed they have the appearance of amateurish improvisation. In part this is clearly sheer incapacity, lack of knowledge, but in part it is also purposeful protest against the competence that has been the mark of death for so long. The rag bag of song, dance, recital, music-hall effect, direct addresses to the audiences, tag-ends of expressionism, which clever directors, notably Miss Joan Littlewood of the Theater Workshop, have devised to cover the shapelessness of these plays may well be the most "effective theater," to use the favorite jargon, that can be found for the purpose; but in nowhere but England would it be thought new, let alone revolutionary. Yet it is a valuable phase in the English theater, because only by taking the old competence to pieces can we hope for anything new to emerge. Yet the dangers are great:

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the critics in particular have succeeded in getting hold of two wrong ends of the stick; they either abuse the new dramatists for not learning their business, by which they mean compressing their ideas into worn out, competent forms, or they mistake the improvisations for art and praise the new dramatists for "moments of poetry" or "moments of good theater" which are exactly the least coherent, the most juvenile, the least promising aspects of their work. It would not be impossible by diligent application for the new dramatists to climb on the old West End competent success car, if they were willing to stop most of what is original in their outlook. Two plays, classed sometimes as belonging to the new school, have done exactly this: *Five Finger Exercise* and *The Long and the Short and the Tall* have all the competence a play like *A Taste of Honey* lacks, yet for all their appearance of revolt, they are basically the old plays we have seen for so long—*Five Finger Exercise* in direct descent from Mr. Noel Coward's early triumph *The Vortex*; *The Long and the Short and the Tall,* the Second World War's *Journey's End*—there is just enough of the new in them to make the matinee ladies feel that they are up-to-date. This way lies one kind of death for the new dramatist. On the other hand, to praise the shapelessness, the improvisation is to condemn the new dramatists to a dependence on actors and directors to disguise their incompetence as much as the more competent dramatists have for so many years depended upon the brilliance of English acting and directing to disguise their complete want of ideas.

Nevertheless in the best of these young dramatists, in particular in Miss Delaney and in Mr. Wesker, there is a real sincerity (neither faked conscious sincerity nor self-satisfied naivete) which, when combined with sharp eyes and ears, acts in such young writers as a substitute for more mature thought and gives real promise of development. Their plays remain, however, so dependent upon the scene portrayed and the dialogue heard, the convincingness of feeling and vision rather than of thought, that to read them before seeing them is likely to prevent any but the most theatrically imaginative from discerning their real worth. It is in the conviction that *A Taste of Honey* and *Chicken Soup with Barley* are worthwhile plays and plays of promise—promise already indeed further fulfilled by Mr. Wesker in *Roots*—that I have chosen to review them with a short account of their present hopes in the English theater rather than by any detailed examination of printed texts that cannot support too close inquiry.

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PARIS LETTER

MALRAUX'S PROGRAM

The statements of M. André Malraux, made in his capacity as Minister of Culture, on the reorganization of the national theaters have had at least one exceptional characteristic: this is the only time, since he has been Minister, that Malraux has expressed himself without disappointing those who have always admired him. As for his press conference when he announced the creation of Algerian "pilot departments" which existed only in his imagination, as for the North African visit of three Nobel Prize winners, one of whom was about to die and none of whom had been consulted, as for his speech in the Place de la République or his futile and bombastic rhetoric on the Acropolis: all his speeches have been wretched failures. He has seemed to be parodying himself, accentuating his faults which are no longer outweighed by a vanished genius. However contestable the statements Malraux made last April 9, when he set forth his policies regarding the theaters of the government to which he belongs, at least he said nothing foolish. And we all heaved a sigh of relief.

Before discussing these measures in detail, André Malraux offered a critical account—extremely critical—of the recent activity of the Comédie-Française. What he could not say was that this venerable company has been under the direction of the most mediocre administrator it has had for a long time. Of course, the powers of an administrator, defined by Napoleon's famous "Moscow decree," are both vague and inadequate. It is the Société des Comédiens Français, that is, the whole group of the actors appointed as sociétaires by their peers, which decides all essential matters as far as the life of the troupe is concerned. The administrator's role is a difficult one, and he can fill it only if his qualities are such that his decisions awaken few dissensions within the troupe itself. Which was the case when Maurice Bourdet filled the post and, to a certain degree, when Pierre-Aimé Touchard was its incumbent. But Pierre Descaves has had nothing on which to base his authority. A mediocre man of letters, a critic without influence, he has constructed his entire career on his father's connections—that father being Lucien Descaves, a friend of the Goncourts whose literary reputation derives solely from his book *Sous-Offs,* a pamphlet violently attack-

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ing military life and the non-commissioned officers of its title. But having been dandled, in childhood, on the knees of Jules Renard, of Tristan Bernard, and of Octave Mirbeau is not enough to create talent; though apparently it is enough to create a career.

As a matter of fact, Pierre Descaves has been one of the administrators most favored by the Comédiens Français themselves: he has left them alone. But the latter soon tasted the bitter fruits of such liberty. Since each of them wanted to win over the house to his own point of view, several factions were created within the troupe, each openly warring against the other. Quite recently, one such clan was headed by the terrible Beatrice Bretty, an excellent actress whose voice is as powerful in the city as on the stage, and whose long liaison with Georges Mandel (the energetic Minister of the Interior and the disciple of Clemenceau, assassinated during the Occupation) has haloed her with a kind of glory that made her invulnerable. The other faction—or one of the others—was, and still is, led by Jean Meyer, also an excellent actor, who has managed to have himself made director of virtually all the new and revived plays seen at the Comédie-Française in recent years.

As for the Théâtre Français, then, the Minister found himself facing an initial problem: to re-establish the administrator's authority. To this concern was added a second, the repertory, and a third, the Salle Luxembourg (formerly the Odéon), which had lately been re-attached to our first national stage. As a matter of fact, the first two problems—the administrator's powers and the repertory—were identified insofar as the company's activity was entirely directed by the actors, the latter being for the most part comic actors and preferring to stage their specialities rather than put on tragic works. The result, as Malruax remarked, was that Labiche figured on our stage more often than Racine, Corneille appearing, finally, as a kind of "poor relation" of Feydeau's. On this score, everything Malraux has said and settled can only be applauded. The Comédie-Française, in recent years—and not only the Comédie-Française, for this has also been the case with the Opéra—has decided that it must be "box office" and that nothing need keep it from such an achievement if it used the same methods as the other theaters: make the audience laugh at all costs, and make it gasp at the scenery. Now, the role of the Théâtre Français can be interpreted only as that of a conservatory for the use of the public. It is, to a degree, a museum of traditions, and the actors who perform in it must consent to relinquish certain audacities which are not suitable on its stage. As for the separation of the former Odéon from the Théâtre Français, it corresponds to nothing but the (justified) desire to give Jean-Louis Barrault a theater. When these two theaters were initially brought to-

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gether, it was with a definite purpose. The obligations which unite the Comédiens Français prevent them from earning as much money as their talent and their fame entitle them to expect. Of course, there can be no question of their acting in other theaters. But they do not even have an opportunity to make a few films a year, so closely are they bound by the repertory system to an almost constant attendance in their theater. Adding a second house to the first guarantees them an opportunity to act more frequently. The actors' salaries fall into two categories: the *douzièmes,* calculated on the basis of the gross receipts and the government subsidies, and the *feux,* which are actually fees paid for each performance. This latter remuneration retains the name it had at the period when actors were given an indemnity which permitted them to light fires to warm their dressing-rooms whenever they were performing in the theater. The creation of a second theater increased the number of *feux* for each actor, since there were two theaters for a single troupe and since each actor was therefore more frequently on stage.

If we agree that the Comédie-Française can exist with a single theater on the Right Bank and if we are gratified to see Barrault comfortably established in Paris at last, we cannot fail to notice, nevertheless, that the Minister's arguments, as he has set them forth to justify this measure, are bad ones: "While the Comédie-Française puts on Labiche, Barrault at his Palais-Royal theater performs Claudel. I think it is time to put on *Le Soulier de Satin* at the Comédie-Française and *Le Dindon* at the Palais Royal." What does this opposition, which is felicitious only in the terms of its expression, actually mean? Does anyone suppose Barrault has been able to support his troupe by performing Claudel? No, he has supported it thanks to his success with *La Vie Parisienne,* and if we had the pleasure of seeing the French Cancan of the Casino de Paris cavorting to Offenbach's sparkling score, we have also had to see poor Madeleine Renaud show her legs, which is not, as we say in the theater, in her line. And last year Barrault had to make up for the failure of Schéhadé's *Histoire de Vasco* and Kafka's *Castle* (the latter adaptation, unfortunately, quite without merit) by numerous performances of *Madame Sans-Gêne,* which cannot really be said to be on a higher level than *Le Dindon.* I scarcely need mention *Occupe-Toi d'Amélie,* which Barrault has toured the world over without anyone's being offended, and rightly so. In other words, Barrault had to be given a theater. There was only the Odéon to give. Why not simply say so, without looking for leaky arguments.

It was understandably necessary to free Monsieur Descaves for other activities and give him time to complete a literary production which no one cares to admit is quite finished already. The new admin-

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istrator chosen to replace him is M. Bréart de Boisanger, former Ambassador to Prague, to whom has been assigned, as artistic advisor, M. Michel Saint-Denis, director of the Centre Dramatique de l'Est. And nothing is more open to dispute than this double appointment. For given the difficulties the Comédie-Française is now encountering, the factions that have formed there, the authority lacking at its head, does anyone suppose that a diplomat, even one who loves the theater, can manage to encompass them all? It is a matter of directing a troupe, and a difficult troupe at that, since, to a degree, it directs itself. Only a man whose competence in theatrical matters is unquestionable—as was the case with M. Maurice Bourdet—could succeed. M. de Boisanger, whatever his good will, risks blunting his sword, or else, if he prefers peace and quiet, he will resign at once.

Michel Saint-Denis presents a different case. He is one of Jacques Copeau's former collaborators; before the war, he was a director of the London Old Vic, with Laurence Olivier; and every Frenchman learned to recognize his voice when he spoke on Radio Free France under the name of Jacques Duchêne. When Pierre Bourdan set up the provincial dramatic centers, Michel Saint-Denis was appointed director of the Centre Dramatique de l'Est, in Strasbourg. But while the young companies of the Grenier de Toulouse or the Comédie de Saint-Etienne—the latter under the direction of Jean Dasté—figured among the best companies in France, it must be said that the Centre Dramatique de l'Est has never shone very brilliantly. I recall one production of *Romeo and Juliet* by this troupe which was a disaster: the wild-eyed Romeo thought he was Hamlet; the Friar Laurence became a figure of farce without any such intention on the part of his interpreter; the production was saved only by a Juliet who did not draw smiles when her nurse said: "Come Lammas-eve at night shall she be fourteen . . .," and who had, besides, a lovely voice and a charming figure. But all the rest . . .

The essential problem of the Comédie-Française, as for any other theater, is that of obtaining actors. It cannot limit itself to offering a yearly contract—which is not always accepted—to the boy and girl who win first prizes in comedy and tragedy in the conservatory examinations. It must also engage other actors, better prepared and more experienced, than these young people. That is, it must know the Paris theater *milieu* through and through. To perform this function, which cannot be asked of an ambassador, after all, the government has selected a man of the theater who has just spent fifteen years in the provinces and who, before that, had been abroad fifteen more.

If the Comédie-Français is a conservatory of traditions, it must also concern itself with that other aspect of the theater's life which is dis-

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covery and renewal. Discovery of new forms, but also of a new public. As for this second aspect, whatever had been done previously has merely been maintained: the various provincial dramatic centers continue to receive their subsidies, which are inadequate, though of course that is not André Malraux's fault. Jean Vilar will remain at the head of the Théâtre National Populaire, whose productions, if they are often disputable, have at least been able to attract an enormous public to works of undeniable merit. As for experiment and renewal . . . On this point, it must be confessed that the Minister has done nothing, even if he has talked a little. He has "given" the Théâtre Récamier to Vilar for experimental plays; he has promised one to Camus. Of course it is odd that Vilar should be given a theater when he already has one, while Camus is merely promised one, though he has none. This is because things have not occurred quite as it seems they have at first glance. The Théâtre Récamier, built by and for Copeau, has been a movie house for many years. Recently restored to its original function, this theater does not belong to the State but to a private association, the Ligue de l'Enseignement, whose purpose is to defend lay instruction. It happens that the League purchased the building in which, along with the theater (then a movie house), its offices were located. Several weeks before Malraux made public his decisions, an agreement was reached between Vilar and the League which the Minister could only confirm. In presenting it as a decision reached on his own, he was obviously attempting to strengthen his position, though he merely unbalanced it, since everyone asked the same question I have already put above: Why should Vilar have two theaters and Camus only a promise? Furthermore, this promise is likely not to be kept for some time: first a theater must be found, and besides, the subsidies allocated for the two "théâtres d'essai" are so minimal that Camus will hesitate to commit himself, even if a theater is found for him.

As for the decisions made with regard to the two lyric theaters, they are much less open to dispute. To put M. Julien in control of the Opéra and the Opéra Comique is to sanction the success of a man who has managed, with the Théâtre des Nations, to make Paris the world's greatest international theater center. His artistic advisors are the worthy Emmanuel Bondeville for music and Roland Petit for the dance. But special confidence is placed in the new artistic director, Gabriel Dussurget, who has made the Aix-en-Provence festival the largest and best French festival as well as one of the most important ones in Europe. I do not know Marcel Lami, who has been appointed to revive the moribund stage of the Opéra Comique.

What are the Opera's problems? Some which this reform will not

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affect: I remember a conversation several years ago with André Cluytens, who had just returned from conducting *Die Meistersinger* in Bayreuth. He had been given eighty rehearsals, whereas it is difficult at the Opéra, with the resources at its disposal, to obtain ten. For this reason, as at the Comédie-Française, the last director, M. Georges Hirch, and especially his predecessor, M. André Lehman, had tried to make the Opéra "box office." The result was a production of *Les Indes Galantes* that made a Rameau *divertissement* into a kind of music hall extravaganza, and a *Magic Flute* during which the noise of the scenery changes drowned out the singers' voices. Malraux apparently wants to restore all the Opéra's old luster, and he remarks that if the State grants an annual five-hundred million francs to the Opéra Comique, "it is not to make it the rival of Romorantin's theater," which is, in fact, what it has become. Of course we are delighted to be told that *Wozzeck* is going to be produced in France at last. But what we have not been told, and what seems important, is whether an intelligent division of repertory between the two houses has been made. There has never been any question, of course, of playing Wagner at the Opéra Comique or *Carmen* at the Opéra—though either would be possible. But the errors I have just referred to must be avoided: *The Magic Flute* and in fact all Mozart's operas, including *Don Giovanni,* are more at home at the Opéra Comique than at the Opéra, simply by virtue of the necessary relation between singers and orchestra.

What we must point out, finally, without blaming André Malraux for it, is that in dealing with the problems of the national theaters, and in settling them as well as possible, only the most obvious and urgent issues have been considered. A French national theater policy must be essentially decentralizing in its effect. The same applies to a similar musical policy. Aside from Strasbourg for symphonic concerts and Toulouse for singing, France is terribly poor in orchestras and companies. As for the theater, nothing need prevent the support and even the multiplication of the provincial dramatic centers (which, when well directed, have scored considerable successes). Nothing, that is, save the lack of funds. For in France such enterprises exist only thanks to the State. Since private individuals and local groups are unable or unwilling to support them, it is up to the State to effect this decentralization. A real national theater policy does not mean merely putting on Racine in Paris rather than Labiche. It means permitting the inhabitants of Quimper or of Brive-la-Gaillarde to see both, and above all it means giving those inhabitants the desire to see them.

Jean Bloch-Michel

(*translated by Richard Howard*)

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ROME LETTER

MORAVIA AND THE THEATER

After the success of his first novel, *Gli Indifferenti* (*The Indifferent Ones*) Alberto Moravia—at that time barely twenty—insisted that he wanted to write a tragedy. He was not to write it until twenty-eight years later, taking his plot from the story of Beatrice Cenci. But the desire to write plays was not simply a need to prove himself in a different genre; it was a desire for maturity and completeness, a desire to illustrate the necessity of human action directly, presenting the actions themselves in their objective logic without the intermediary of that *deus ex machina,* the narrator. The narrator in fact does not reason out the actions of his characters: he invents them, leaving their credibility to the suggestive power of the invention itself, while the dramatist must account for his inventions to his audience and justify their necessity in terms of logic.

Moravia's first work in the theater, in 1947, an adaptation of *The Indifferent Ones,* was nothing more than a theatrical translation of the novel. The comedy, *La Mascherata* (directed by Georgio Streheler at the Little Theatre in Milan), was also adapted from a novel, but it was in many ways an original play, not a simple adaptation.

The novel, *La Mascherata* (*The Carnival*), was published in 1941, and was immediately banned by the Fascists. They saw in it not only a satire of Fascism, but a *roman à clef* dealing with the love affair of Mussolini and Clara Petacci (of which Moravia was in fact totally ignorant). If the novel did not please the Fascists, neither did it please the anti-Fascists. It was a kind of romantic fantasy on the failure in love of a dictator of a vaguely Latin American country, complicated by the story of a tragicomic conspiracy organized by policemen who are at the same time conspirators and by conspirators who are at the same time policemen. At the end, the police-conspirators undo the conspirators-police, and the only victim is a sincere conspirator who really wants to free his country from tyranny but succeeds only in killing the dictator's mistress and finally in getting himself killed, all adding up to the further glory of the Chief of Police who organized the whole affair.

The book certainly alluded to Fascism, but, so to speak, without touching it: it was not written to hurt or to please either one side or

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the other. It was not a satire but a kind of grimace, a *divertimento,* evasive and cynical. It is not surprising that Mussolini, whose erotic pride was supposedly hurt, saw nothing in it that was dangerous and was satisfied with the fact that the story really took place in Guatemala and that the revolutionaries were as much made fun of as the followers of the state. Personally (we now know he spent the major part of his precious time reading newspapers and book manuscripts), he authorized the publication of the novel. But others more suspicious smelled sacrilege in the simple fact that Moravia—a writer who had remained stubbornly resistant to the Fascist climate—now dared to play with dictators and policemen as though they were puppets in some private game. Justifiably, therefore, they persuaded Mussolini not only to ban the book, but also to prohibit the newspapers and editors from publishing Moravia. However, not less justifiably, the opposition felt deceived by this evasive and withdrawn book, especially those who thought of Moravia as a realistic writer, and expected him to deal directly with Fascist reality instead of fleeing to the bizarre, and ridiculing both the dictators and revolutionaries. And yet those who understood Moravia could not doubt that he saw dictatorship as the crowning example of everything hateful and false in Italy. Moravia could not write a line which did not exude his admirable hatred of the world as it was. However, the moralizing and the general thinking of the anti-Fascist movement did not impress him. He thought the opposition amounted to little more than honest sighs, and he reached the sorrowful conclusion that from now on the world belonged to the violent. Why should he have hidden his conviction? Why should he have made believe he was Cato, when he was drawn to the world of Petronius and Apuleius?

By his farce in *La Mascherata,* Moravia showed that he was incapable of accepting the attitude that both sides pushed on him: the belief that politics was an ultimate and decisive reality, and that from political decision would follow the truth, morality, and tranquility of conscience that as a novelist he could find only in human situations. Not that he did not take sides; he was against those who wanted to persuade or force him to take sides. Moravia's political attitude foreshadowed that of the present generation.

The Carnival, however, was a *divertimento.* If it was an act of protest and liberty, it was not because of its kidding, but because it dared to lower the subject of political power to the level of farce. If the tale had a moral, it was more or less this: reality resembles a diabolic mechanism expressly geared to frustrate the desires, the sense, and the good intentions of men; but it must not be thought that the sly

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manipulators who try with cunning to control this mechanism and to subject other people by violence are spared the common degradation. No matter how powerful and armed the individual, he remains always at the mercy of his weakness, and can dominate everything except his own character and the consequences of his actions; the terrible dictator Tereseo, at the end, does not dominate anything, neither his woman, his subordinates, nor his subjects.

Moravia has rightly said of the comedy which he drew out of his novel that it is "a mixture of political satire, afntasy, psychological drama, and passion. More than a satire of dictatorship, it is a satire of that world which eixsts and takes shape, when a dictatorship exists."

I would say that even more than a satire of dictatorship, the comedy is a satire of what happens to human relations when men are blinded by the illusion and presumption that they can dominate reality through the mechanism of politics. Then the opaque entanglement of existence reaches a state of paroxysm, and there is a universal masquerade, in which no one can say who is strong and who is weak, who is the puppet, who the puppeteer. The one certain thing is that both ingenuous passions and Machiavellian slyness carry their own destruction within themselves. This is one of Moravia's characteristic themes, and it reappears in tragic form in *Beatrice Cenci.*

Though in the novel Moravia only hinted at political satire, in the play he pushed it as far as he could while still remaining within the limits of farce. In his play he attacked not only the ridiculous dictatorship but also the ingenuity and ingenuous two-facedness of the revolutionaries, and declared even more emphatically than in his novel that his position was to resist the temptation of taking sides, because he was convinced that the human condition cannot be resolved in politics. The only truth which politics brings to light, according to Moravia, is the foolish ambiguity of everything; the fact that no matter how much he tries, the individual remains a muddy mixture, a victim of his own dim vision and of the cold mechanics of the world. The most reevaling characters in the play are, on one side, Perro the policeman, the black mind of intrigue, and on the other Saverio, the innocent, inevitable victim.

The strongest and most typical of Morovia's scenes in the play are that in which Perro, pretending he is a revolutionary, patiently explains to Saverio the organization of the party (in this case a caricature of the Communist party), and secondly, the scene in which he brings out the moral of the story while arguing with the Chief of Police that there is no point in trying to secure oneself from duplicity when the game of power is in fact a double game altogether. To the Chief of Police who

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suspects him of acting in earnest instead of faking, Perro replies coldly: "This country of ours is half unripe and half ripe. It is you that has to give one name or another to this stage. To true crimes you give the name of revolution, to the false that of dictatorship."

Sarcasms of this sort do not only refer to Fascism but to contemporary politics in general. Politics, in the rough, simple, and perspicacious manner in which Moravia sees it, boils down to the clear and aggressive attitude, that in the abstractions of politics, individuals—already so incapable of clarity and so weak in ordinary life—cannot but appear openly as what they are: puppets of fate. In the end those who manage are the ingenuous and the natural: Saverio the terrorist on one side, and on the other the beautiful Fausta: both play with fire without realizing the danger. The dictator Tereso sums up concisely the dialectic of events: "Instead of a wedding, there will be a funeral, that's all." *La Mascherata* is a play that is directly descended from Machiavelli's *Mandragola,* because of the unbelieving and lucid spirit which animates it, and above all because of the dry and cruel way of treating the characters. Machiavellian, however, at one remove, for Moravia's sarcasm includes Machiavellianism.

In *Beatrice Cenci,* written in 1957, Moravia has written a tragedy of Machiavellianism. In fact, his attitude toward Machiavellianism is the basic motivation of his art. It is understandable that having become a mature novelist, he would have wanted to push this theme into the clarity characteristic of the drama.

Moravia's work is an illuminating example of the relation between narrative and dramaatic art, between the impulse to narrate and the impulse to dramatize. Very distant from drama because of its pervasive feeling of the opacity of the world and the ambiguity of every human attitude, nevertheless his art also aspires to the nakedness of dramatic conflict as the solution of his most pressing torment, which is to rediscover necessity in a world in which everything seems to happen by chance or weakness or from a general lack of conviction. From *Gli Indifferenti* to *La Mascherata,* to *The Conformist* to the *Roman Stories,* it would be easy to mark the stages of this search for necessity. It is a search for something so fixed and adamant in individuals and the world, that it can finally allow us—beyond the ambiguities of chance and intrigue—to conceive of clear-cut conflicts, decisive clashes, resolute actions. It is the possibility, in short, of finding just what is lacking in the world of Moravia.

Had Moravia wanted to do a play by current standards he had only to dramatize one of his plots, for the art of dialog is one of his

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gifts. He evidently has another goal: to succeed in giving life to a true conflict of emotions, executed with the intellectual rigor which true drama demands. Moravia was fascinated by the deepest possibilities of the theater, and it is from this desire for tragedy that one must judge his *Beatrice Cenci*. He has not entirely succeeded, but it is honest and intelligent work, whose defects, even, deserve attention.

In form Moravia has tried to imitate the Elizabethan drama, cutting it down as much as possible to classic canons; that is, he does not allow himself recourse to color and episodes, but forces himself to an almost Aristotelian unity and concentration. Francesco, his wife Lucrezia, Beatrice, and the two servants Olimpio and Marizio, are the only characters in the drama. All the action takes place in Petrella's castle, where Francesco Cenci has imprisoned Beatrice and her mother. It faithfully follows the story of the Cenci as we know it from the record of the trial. He leaves out the popular legend which appealed to Shelley so much, and which, with the addition of a fantastic interpretation of Francesco as a Renaissance superman, is also the tale which Stendhal tells. The story of the incest is part of the legend; it was invented by the defense lawyer, as a desperate measure to save Beatrice and her mother. Not that Francesco would not have been capable of it: he was a fierce man, a kind of gangster who we are reminded was to reappear centuries later as a Fascist. But it is a fact that he did not commit incest; at least there are no proofs of it. The economy which Moravia has achieved by eliminating from the story of Beatrice every pathetic or demonic element gives the drama an exemplary unity; in the contemporary Italian theater there are writers who know their craft better than Moravia, but there is no one who can compare with him in this redirection of action to the essential, no one who is so far from the anecdotal and the cinematic. Moravia has thought about facts, not about form: the facts of the story of Beatrice, their sordidness, their violence, and the incredibly brutal milieu which they reveal: the powerful Roman bourgeois family of the seventeenth century, which must have appeared to Moravia like the gigantic shadow of the Roman bourgeois society that has provided him with the essential material of his novels.

The finest act of *Beatrice Cenci* is a model of precise and economical exposition. The scene between Francesco Cenci and his servant Olimpio is certainly the best in the play: it begins with the brutal trouble which enrages old Cenci, and pushes him to work it out in violent and overbearing actions. He is in financial difficulties. To economize as well as to prove the power of his will over that of his wife and daughter, he imprisons them in a castle far from Rome (where they might spend

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too much money). Olimpio, calculating, shrewd, and mediocre, opposes Francesco. He does not object to his master's tyranny over his wife and daughter, for he too believes that it is best to do what ever one thinks and wants—but only "to a certain extent"; that is, one stops in time; above all one acts shrewdly. So Olimpio designs to use Beatrice's desire for freedom to get her to serve his own pleasure, while he continues to serve Francesco for his own ends. This is the intrigue which allows Beatrice to induce Olimpio to kill Cenci, and finally causes him to be executed with her.

The contrast between Francesco and Beatrice, as Moravia has conceived it, is that between a man who needs to torture, subject, and annihilate the will of others, in order to feel alive (a type of Nazi), and a girl who is not at all angelic and wants with all her energy to be a woman, have beautiful clothes, love, marry, exist. When she is kept by force from satisfying her instincts, she does not hesitate to commit a crime (she is a kind of "Teddy Girl," or "Angry Young Lady"). To this conflict Moravia has added another theme: that of the ungovernable nature of human actions in which Machiavellian schemes degenerate inevitably into a trap for the trappers as well as the trapped.

It would have been enough to intensify the logic of the situation from act to act in order to create thet ragic tension and justify the patricide and the final punishment. The conflict between Francesco and Beatrice, as Moravia has conceived it, is not only that between an unworthy father and a daughter pushed to murderous hate; it is also the clash between the man endowed with blind power but not with reason, and of the victim pushed to extreme measures by the unrelieved suffering of a slavery. (In a dramatic moment, Beatrice laments the time of "fathers who are worse than sons." In this everyone will recognize our own times.) It would have been natural if this conflict had explicitly become the conflict between that which is inhuman today in every power that pretends to be absolute and the grim and nihilistic rebellion which faces it as a victim, not in the name of an ideal freedom, but in the blind will to live and to be justified, and, like the tyranny itself, in a kind of desperation and anguish. Negation against negation.

At this point—that is, if the conflict had been carried this far—we would have had a truly modern tragedy. But in this Moravia the novelist has overcome the dramatist. He allowed himself to be intimidated by the facts, and has tried to explain the action of Beatrice psychologically, with an authentic anecdote about her having lost her innocence when as a girl she saw her father violate a woman servant. But this, which could have been a valid motive in a novel is neither tragic

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nor dramatic: it is a prosaic explanation. In conclusion, Moravia has succeeded in essentially telling the story of Beatrice Cenci, but he has not succeeded in motiavting it. If he has not, it is because he has stressed the personal side of the story while neglecting its larger social meaning. He does not make Francesco into a tyrant, but only into a monstrous father; he does not make Beatrice into a rebel, but into a parricide. Shelley did so in a context of angelic anarchism. Moravia might have done so in the context of contemporary nihilism.

But with so much unauthentic theater around, Moravia's nostalgia for that superior form of poetic explanation which drama is, remains an authentic and significant fact.

Nicola Chiaromonte

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POETRY CHRONICLE

LIGHT AND DARK. By Barbara Howes. Wesleyan University Press. $3; paperback, $1.65.
SAINT JUDAS. By James Wright. Wesleyan University Press. $3; paperback, $1.65.
A STRANGER'S PRIVILEGE. By Robert Pack. Macmillan Company. $3.50.
APPLES FROM SHINAR. By Hyman Plutzik. Wesleyan University Press. $3; paperback, $1.65.

The four poets reviewed here are by no means as unlike as they appear to be on the surface of their poems. In curious ways they are as American as any contemporary poets I have read. They are not necessarily American in their landscapes or in their speech idioms. At least two of them are saturated in European culture, and none of them are American in the disqualifying sense that often makes one look at the ceiling. Their Americanness is in their moral quality, and in their intellectual and spiritual affinities with some deep strains of experience coming down from the American past. By which I do not mean that they are not of their time, for they are: but quite as certainly, they belong to an American tradition that flows directly to us from the nineteenth century, however they may modify it themselves. This is to say at once that all five have given us valuable volumes.

Barbara Howes' *Light and Dark* is in continuity with our intellectual tradition through an important and related, but different current than that of the others. Since the War and our extensive fellowship program for Americans abroad (and perhaps also since many other things) the American's quest in the Old World has seemed a little tarnished, and not at all what it was once. We ourselves might admit this is because we are now so powerful abroad, and concede that power corrupts. Mr. Louis Simpson in a recent book, *A Dream of Governors,* concludes a poem with these suggestive lines about an American in Italy:

> *But I am an American, and bargain*
> *In the Thieves' Market, where the junk of culture*
> *Lies in the dust—clay shards, perhaps Etruscan,*
> *And wedding rings. . . .*

The fine thing about Barbara Howes's poems is that her attitude goes back to a better pattern of culture in which the American sought knowledge and enlightenment in Europe, not the acquisition of "things"

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that have already deteriorated into mere "junk" in his view. Her "Portrait of an Artist" defines her own sensibility and that of the nineteenth-century Americans—Ticknor, William Story, Henry James, and all the rest—who did not go to bargain in the Thieves' Market:

For dear life some do
Many a hard thing.
Train the meticulous mind
Upon meaning, seek
And find, and yet discard
All that is not of reality's tough rind.

A cool divining rod,
The heart, another tool,
Keen as a hawk's eye,
Supple as water, bends
Responsive to all four
Humors. In many sympathy runs dry

Or blots and blurs. To be
Ascetic for life's sake,
Honest and passionate,
Is rare. I think of those
Images of Buddha placed
In shells, and later found encased in pearl.

Seldom has the verb "to do" been more strenuously employed than in the first line. It controls the spare lines that follow with imperious sternness, lines that rhythmically enact the enlightened kind of asceticism they enjoin. This is a true daughter of the Puritans, if by that we signify all that is good in the phrase. It is what one might call the "culture poems" that are most successful. In "Primavera" she travels with her husband in a horse-drawn carriage through a war-threatened Italy on a cultural pilgrimage that is insistently Jamesian:

The horse with consumption coughed like the end of the world.
We heard its tremblors echo in that dry bark,
But on our carriage rolled; we minted miles. . . .

Onward and on we rode until the dawn.
From jeweled opera-box and catacomb
We summoned up the past: released, the ghosts
Came forth in cloth of gold and tilting heaume
In every city street and horned lane. . . .

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And on and on; where would the journey end?
Giotto conceived a tower in pure air,
Heraldic rainbow; balanced on her shell
All beauty woke in Aphrodite fair
As history's fairest. Now to trespassers
On the volcano's flank the tocsins blare:
Our mare's obsidian hooves foreknelled the end.

On the eve of the War, where indeed would the cultural journey end? A tragic verbal ambiguity exists in Giotto's tower conceived "in pure air," and the anachronistic trip across Italy in a horse-drawn carriage to view the cathedral cities (a journey I can only conceive being undertaken by a true Bostonian in those days) becomes a race with the death of much that matters greatly. The consumptive cough of the poor old horse in the first line is not descriptive but symbolic.

It is no novelty at this late date to point out that American artists rarely treat the subject of love with great success. One of the poets dealt with here, being Jewish, is not necessarily confined by the American tradition in this respect, but each of the other three poets presents his own solution to the problem, and each of the solutions is given within the limiting context of American experience. There may be other alternatives, especially in the case of contemporary American dramatists: but such alternatives seem to exist, if they do, within a specialized area opened up by aberrational psychology, and hence not really in the old native American pattern of feeling and behavior at all. Perhaps the most successful of these alternatives is simply that of recognition, turning an honest and historical eye on the facts of the situation. Since the situation *is* history, it may be better to keep it so, and so Barbara Howes treats it in her poem "In the Cold Country," which ends:

. . . the dooming land
Where nothing can take root but frost, has won.
And what of warmth and what of joy? They are
Sequestered elsewhere, southward, where the sun
Speaks. For all our mermaid vigilance
And balance, all goes under. Underneath
The land's grey wave we falter and fall back
To hibernate within the caves of death.

A second alternative, less honest but hardly less of New England, is that of self-irony. Eliot practiced this in "Prufrock" with great success, and almost made a virtue out of the American difficulty of giving

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oneself in love. Mr. Robert Pack gives the theme an extraordinary twist by introducing echoes of the Loathly Lady theme:

I met a monster in a wood:
"It's not my fault!" choked through her cries,
Blowing her nose as loud as she could,
Tears pouring from her bloodshot eyes.

Being practised in the art,
I raised my lance to poke her through;
But I could not play out my part—
Hers was no strategy I knew.

"The ugliest need love the most,
And if you take me home with you,
You'll find at last someone to trust,
For beauty never could be true."

Such a sentiment made me pause,
Though she was not my type a bit;
It seemed against my whole life's cause
To find love and not pity it.

She saw me weaken and she smiled—
I swear she gloated in her grin;
I must confess that got me riled:
I took my lance and did her in.

One remembers how much better Kemp Owyne brought things off in that wonderful old ballad. Hearing of a female monster with foul breath whose long hair, twisted thrice around a tree, held the poor thing prisoner, Kemp sought her out. He must have been unnerved when she asked him to kiss her. Nevertheless:

He stepped in, gave her a kiss;
The royal brand he brought him wi';
Her breath was sweet, her hair grew short,
And twisted nane about the tree;
And smilingly she came about,
As fair a woman as fair could be.

Which shows the power of love. But Americans don't share Kemp's instinctive nature. There is also available to the American poet a kind of Sherwood Anderson-ish variation on Mr. Pack's solution to the problem. I shall come back to Mr. Pack's poetry, but I should like to digress

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here long enough to consider two verses from "The Accusation" in Mr. James Wright's *Saint Judas*:

I loved your face because your face
Was broken. When my hands were heavy,
You kissed me only in a darkness
To make me daydream you were lovely.
All the lovely emptiness
On earth is easy enough to find.
You had no right to turn your face
From me. Only the truth is kind.

* * *

If I were given a blind god's power
To turn your daylight on again,
I would not raise you smooth and pure:
I would bare to heaven your uncommon pain,
Your scar I had a right to hold,
To look on, for the pain was yours,
Now you are dead, and I grow old,
And the doves cackle out of doors.

I can imagine what D.H. Lawrence would have said to this, especially the second verse. Still, one owes Mr. Wright some qualification of one's distaste, for surely the point of the poem is that the "disgusting scar" on the woman's face is matched by a hidden scar on the heart of the man—Hester's public A matched by the A under Dimmesdale's tunic. Mr. Wright says his poems have all been written to examine "exactly what *is* a good and humane action," but this poem goes limp with analytic self-pity in which a feeling of guilt for personal inadequacy is righteously transferred to a scapegoat. Kemp Owyne would never have felt abused because "Her breath was sweet, her hair was short." But of course Kemp Owyne was not an American, and the deficiency in this poem is partly at least in our tradition of feeling—or of not feeling. Elsewhere Mr. Wright can often be as good as Robinson, which is measured praise.

If Barbara Howes's poems are finely in touch with the old American quest for the life of the mind and the senses in Europe, Mr. Robert Pack and Mr. Hyam Plutzik are in touch with another tradition perhaps even more central. Two great impressive symbols dominated creative thinking in nineteenth-century America from Emerson through Whitman, who were themselves responsible for the delivery. The first was the widening circle of Emerson, the point of consciousness expanding until it took in everything and *was* everything. And there was that

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ascending spiral up which Walt Whitman glides with so much ease in his best poems:

There is no stoppage and never can be stoppage,
If I, you, and the worlds, and all beneath or upon their
surfaces, were this moment reduced back to a pallid float,
it would not avail in the long run,
We should surely bring up again where we now stand,
And surely go as much farther, and then farther and farther.

Poe turned both these images upside down. The ascending spiral, viewed from Poe's end, became his descent into the maelstrom, and he managed to contract Emerson's expanding circle back to its vanishing point at the horrifying close of *Eureka.* These opposed tendencies continued to operate for later artists, creating great difficulties. Some went down the spiral and some went up, but those who, like the grand old Duke of York, were only halfway up, were neither up nor down:

Neither movement from nor towards,
Neither ascent nor decline.

Emerson argued: "There is no outside, no enclosing wall, no circumference to us." But finding his expanding circle a well at last, later poets have tried various compromises. With no place to go, the cosmic progression into infinity is replaced by the eternal return, and endless expansion by repetition.

I should like to go back now to Mr. Pack's *A Stranger's Privilege* and consider it in this context. One of the Emersonian notes about Mr. Pack is that the universe begins within oneself, and one never quite knows whether it is anywhere else or not. I once tried to show in another place that, despite his unfair abuse of Emerson, Wallace Stevens's thinking shaped up very similarly in the end. Stevens no less than Emerson might have claimed: "I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all . . . I am part or parcel of God." Stevens called this universal solvent Imagination and Emerson called it Oversoul, but it amounted to much the same thing in the end. The main difference was that the imagination for Stevens (at least until his last poems in "The Rock," which are the most Emersonian of all) was constantly recalled to the particulars of *things* in a somewhat limiting sense. Expansibility had bounds. The Emersonian note in Mr. Pack undoubtedly comes by way of Stevens, for I know of no poet who has used Stevens' influence more intelligently or sensitively. But "The Fall" must serve for the basis of the very little I can say here. My badly mutilated quotation begins halfway through the poem—Adam speaking:

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And when I opened up my eyes I saw
The dawn light frost the apple tree.
The beginning, the separated heavens,
The sea and the land, the salt fecundity
And the innocence of animals—
All here in the garden as it had to be,
Fixed and waiting as in a memory
That draws you back within a dream,
And you wake to find the memory is true,
And the dream is what must come to be,
Fixed and waiting as in a memory.
And so it was at my waking I found her
By my side, true as she had to be,
True as the singing miracle of sky and birds,

. . . I opened up my eyes and saw
The dawn light frost the apple tree.
And the dreaming in my mind conceived
The blame and the jealous blow and the tide
Of blood gathering to the sorrow of waters,
The animals, two by two, again
The monotony of peace, again the unheard cry
And the torturer's escape, the depression of prophecy
And the ultimate anger of the fire—
Because of the beginning. And I remember
She was gone, and I knew why, and even though
It was a dream, I ran, hoping to stop her,
Trying to wake before I dreamed the beginning;
And I did, and all was forgotten,
And there, eyes closed, we lay together,
But I, not wanting to dream the beginning,
Remembering it did not have to be,
I opened up my eyes and saw
The dawn light frost the apple tree.

The telling repetition of the lines, ". . . I opened up my eyes and saw/ The dawn light frost the apple tree," establishes the circular movement of the poem, always turning back upon itself—the theme of the eternal return with no progression. These circles never ascend spirally like Whitman's, and they never expand like Emerson's circle. The symbolic machinery of the nineteenth century has broken down, but essentially it is still the same machinery. The reality of the sensible universe

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begins ideally *inside* Adam. He is like Emerson's transparent eyeball or Whitman's cosmic I in "Song of Myself," but the cosmic process has got caught in a groove and always carries Adam back to the same apple tree. Emerson and Whitman rejected evil and found it easy to leave behind by naming it something else. But the modern poet whose universe is threatened with direct destruction reads the awful inescapable lesson of that apple tree in every moment of his night. In a strong poem like "The Rumor" we see how the recognition of evil renders the old symbols impotent, for Judgment intervening puts an end to a process Emerson and Whitman had conceived as interminable.

I know nothing about Mr. Hyam Plutzik, but I gather from his poems that he is of Polish Jewish descent. Just as a similar fact lent a distance to Disraeli's imagination, enabling him in his novels and in his Young England party to view the English aristocracy and Tory ideals in a simple, charming perspective that would scarcely have been available to an Anglo-Saxon, so Mr. Plutzik brings a moving, elegiac note to his modification of Whitman's spiral, so quietly effective and sensitive that it becomes more a matter of personal sensibility than of metaphysics (though on occasion Mr. Plutzik can be quite metaphysical enough):

As the great horse rots on the hill
till the stars wink through his ribs;
As the genera of horses become silent,
the thunder of the hooves receding in the silence;
As the tree shrivels in the wind of time,
as the wind of Time dries the locust tree—
Thus you prepare the future for me and my loved one.

I have been in many towns and seen innumerable houses,
also rocks, trees, people, stars and insects.
Thieves, like ants, are making off with them,
taking them to your old ant-hill.
Thus you prepare the future for me and my loved ones.

What spider made the machine of many threads?

The threads run
from time's instants to all the atoms of the universe.
In each instant a wheel turns in your head, threads go taut,
and one of a quintillion atoms is transmuted.
Thus you prepare the future for me and my loved ones.

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As the great horse is transmuted on the hill
Till the stars wink through his skull;
As the stars become husk and radiance;
As the locust tree is changed by the wind of Time;
As the wind Time too will lapse, will blow from another quarter—
Thus you prepare the future for me and my loved ones.

Marius Bewley

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CORRESPONDENCE

Sirs:

I think Elizabeth Hardwick's review of Saul Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King,* perceptive though it often is, mistakes both the author's intention and the special quality of the book. "The fantastic journey is perilous," she writes. "A real man can only be evicted from a real place to make room for the universal destiny, playing itself out among eternal scenery." So she dutifully looks for deep symbolism—and doesn't find it. She thinks Bellow was just kidding when he recently "expressed himself against 'deep readers' and symbolic interpretation" and she magisterally states: "*Henderson* cannot be read except deeply, nor be understood except symbolically."

Why not? Why not take it on the surface, as a humorous *tour de force* which gets its effect from the manipulation of rhetoric? I read it so and enjoyed it more than any current novel I've read since *Lolita,* also a fantastic journey, also a verbal *tour de force,* also very funny. *Augie March* seemed to me to be reaching for deep meanings and not quite achieving them, but *Henderson* I thought just right. You can read Reichian therapy, existentialism, etcetera into it but you don't have to; the surface fun and games are enough. I think the effect comes from: (1) Bellow's extraordinary ear for language, all kinds of language; (2) the comic vigor and inventiveness of the description; (3) the speech of the natives, with its wonderful combination of pidgin English and formality—doubtless no African native ever spoke that way but doubtless they should because in some cockeyed way it exactly suggests the quality of the primitive mind; (4) the charm and interest of

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Henderson himself, who might be garrulous but instead is completely articulate, one of those rare examples of a fictional genius, outsize and fantastic, who really delivers the goods, that is he does strike the reader, or at least this reader, as being fully as extraordinary a person as his creator intended him to be. This compulsive monologist should be the biggest bore in creation, instead he is fascinating. I think this is because he is always unexpected and yet his unexpectedness always, once it has occurred, is just what one might have expected, given his personality. Kind of the way life is. "Henderson, then, is not a 'character,'" Miss Hardwick writes, by which she seems to mean he is not a convincingly real person. True, but beside the point. Like saying Pantagruel, with whom Henderson has much in common, isn't believable. Or that other compulsive monologist, Mr. Nabokov's Humbert Humbert.

Perhaps Bellow, though I'm sure he'd be indignant at the suggestion, has learned something since *Augie March*. Perhaps he is pulling in his horns in order to penetrate deeper, perhaps he has given up his ambition to be the great American novelist in order to be a good American novelist. (*Seize the Day,* his other post-*Augie* book, also seems to me superb, of course in an entirely different way.) If so, he should be encouraged and not damned with praise that is faint, however intelligent.

May I conclude with a few rhetorical questions including this one? Why has literary criticism become so excessively serious-minded? Why does a critic as clever and witty as Miss Hardwick miss the obvious point about *Henderson* and maunder on about the lack of symbolic meaning? How come Lionel Trilling writes in *Encounter* an article about *Lolita*—with whose thesis I agree most wholeheartedly though it might have

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been stated more succinctly—which says almost nothing about Lolita's chief literary qualities, its stylistic *brio* and its humor? The genres that one would expect our age to excel in, for all sorts of historic-cultural reasons that the readers of *Partisan Review* know as well as I do, are rhetoric and comedy. Why, then, when they appear, do we not recognize them?

Dwight Macdonald

Sir:

My attention has been called to the "London Letter" by a Mr. Alvarez, in your Summer issue 1959.

In this, Mr. Alvarez, a writer of insipid, mewling, flabby but cramped verse, and puking pert little criticisms, said, "Like Ginsberg, Logue belongs, as Dr. Leavis said of the Sitwells, more to the history of publicity than to the history of poetry."

Dr. Leavis did not say this of "the Sitwells"—but of *Edith* Sitwell—myself.

It does not matter *what* Dr. Leavis says—he is always wincing and whimpering about something, and, by now, has been insulting to many of the most important writers of our time. But we shall always cherish him for the oriental magnificence of his prose style, which caused the writer of a letter to the *Times Literary Supplement,* a while ago, to enquire if he had been at school in India.

Mr. Alvarez, however, is a different matter. He is not even funny, he is just dull. He does not belong to the history of anything at all, and he cannot be put in his place, because he has not got one—not of any kind.

But I have, however, taught him his little manners, in a review of a book written by him. The review was published in *The Sunday Times* (of London). It was kindly, and I ended by saying that Mr. Alvarez is young, and may do better—at least I hoped

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so. It was printed under the heading "Better By and By." It is no doubt trying for persons of this kind, hoping to mew their way into general attention, to find that attention focused on myself and my family. Hence the complaint about "the history of publicity." And no doubt Mr. Alvarez thought I should not see his London Letter.

Well, I *have* seen it. And if he is impudent again, I shall teach him his manners again, and the second lesson will be a good deal more severe than the first.

I am,
Sir,
Yours faithfully
Edith Sitwell

P.S. Mr. Ginsberg can write Mr. Alvarez—(a versifier of no talent) off the map. It is true that Mr. Alvarez and Dr. Leavis belong to the category of the Death-Watch-Beetle. But though they are just as much of a nuisance, they fail to destroy. All that happens is that one is bored by a ceaseless, dull, ticking noise.

E.S.

Sirs:

Dr. Leavis wrote: "the Sitwells (*sic*) belong to the history of publicity rather than of poetry" (*New Bearings in English Poetry,* New Editions, London, 1954, p. 73).

As for the rest of Dame Edith's letter: since it, too, belongs to the history of publicity rather than poetry, I am afraid that, as a literary critic, I am not qualified to reply.

Yours etc.,
A. Alvarez

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